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COLLECTED ESSAYS OF PHILIP GUEDALLA

I

MEN OF LETTERS

WORKS BY PHILIP GUEDALLA
AUTHOR OF "PALMERSTON"

THE SECOND EMPIRE
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MEN OF LETTERS

BY
PHILIP GUEDALLA

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BY WAY OF PREFACE

AND what am I to write by way of preface? An embarrassed author sits, pen in hand, before the looking-glass and tries his hardest not to be self-conscious. But perhaps he ought to be. Perhaps the occasion calls for a demure self-consciousness, a modest pride, a coy admission of his imperfections checked with a blushing hint that here and there, perhaps . . . For it is, *to him at any rate, an occasion. To see himself "collected," "uniform," almost "definitive" is a strange and even an alarming spectacle that seems to leave him half-way to the crowning glories of his Memorial Edition, boxed, limited, and copiously embellished with photogravures of his birthplace. It is a solemn moment; and such moments call imperatively for a due solemnity of preface.*

BY WAY OF PREFACE

The preface is a tricky instrument. Its happiest airs, perhaps, are played when an experienced writer flutes his appreciation of some junior. The poise, the measured praise, the kindly gesture of promotion that waves the youngster to a higher seat, have an inimitable grace. The mellow introducer blends with his blushing protégé in a charming picture. "What ease," we cry, "what chivalry; see how the elder smiles, how well his modesty becomes the youth." That mode, alas! is inadmissible when a prefacing author shamelessly introduces himself. But need it be? Here, after all, in this collection of ten years of essay-writing we have a writer eight, ten, and sometimes even thirteen years younger than his more experienced introducer. May not the senior expose his junior's merits in the graceful, customary preface?

This young writer, then, whose work I am

asked to introduce (and willingly comply), wrote essays. He wrote them—in default of novels or epic poetry—because he liked to see his prose in print; and editors will often print an essay when they fight shy of nobler compositions. He even assembled them, after a judicious toilet, in occasional volumes whose contents have been rearranged to form the present collection. It groups them roughly under the topics with which they dealt. For (it must be confessed) they dealt with topics. Even a kindly introducer should relax his introductory smile to confess this grave departure from the traditions, severely haphazard, of the English essay. For since Lamb went out of copyright, our essayists have written with increasing tenderness about nothing at all. The best of them (and how very good they are) can irradiate a complete vacuum with a fund of graceful prose and the unfailing charm of their per-

sonalities. The essayist has come to stand for a delightful entertainer who backs apologetically on to the stage and exposes with unrivalled grace his minor weaknesses; and the essay, which in Macaulay's hands was a sabre, is now a piccolo on which accomplished lips flute shy variations on the theme of nothing. But his deficiencies compel the admission that there is no place in this delicious company for the essayist here introduced. Perhaps, indeed, his papers were not strictly essays. For he wrote, with rare persistence, upon large, substantial subjects and never once about himself. Yet I am wrong. He did write once about himself, and that once too often—but only by way of preface.

PHILIP GUEDALLA.

1927

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SOME HISTORIANS

It was Quintilian or Mr. Max Beerbohm who said, "History repeats itself: historians repeat each other." The saying is full of the mellow wisdom of either writer, and stamped with the peculiar veracity of the Silver Age of Roman or British epigram. One might have added, if the aphorist had stayed for an answer, that history is rather interesting, when it repeats itself: historians are not. In France, which is an enlightened country enjoying the benefits of the Revolution and a public examination in rhetoric, historians are expected to write in a single and classical style of French. The result is sometimes a rather irritating uniformity; it is one long Taine that has no turning, and any quotation may be attributed with safety to Guizot, because

la nuit tous les chats sont gris. But in England, which is a free country, the restrictions natural to ignorant (and immoral) foreigners are put off by the rough island race, and history is written in a dialect which is not curable by education, and cannot (it would seem) be prevented by injunction.

Historians' English is not a style; it is an industrial disease. The thing is probably scheduled in the Workmen's Compensation Act, and the publisher may be required upon notice of the attack to make a suitable payment to the writer's dependants. The workers in this dangerous trade are required to adopt (like Mahomet's coffin) a detached standpoint—that is, to write as if they took no interest in the subject. Since it is not considered good form for a graduate of less than sixty years' standing to write upon any period that is either familiar or interesting,

this feeling is easily acquired, and the resulting narrations present the dreary impartiality of the Recording Angel without that completeness which is the sole attraction of his style. Wilde complained of Mr. Hall Caine that he wrote at the top of his voice. But a modern historian, when he is really detached, writes like someone talking in the next room; and few writers have equalled the chilly precision of Coxe's observation that the Turks "sawed the Archbishop and the Commandant in half, and committed other grave violations of international law."

Having purged his mind of all unsteadying interest in the subject, the young historian should adopt a moral code of more than Malthusian severity that may be learned from any American writer of the last century upon the Renaissance or the decadence of Spain. This manner, which is especially

necessary in passages dealing with character, will lend to his work the grave dignity that is requisite for translation into Latin prose, that supreme test of an historian's style. It will be his misfortune to meet upon the byways of history the oddest and most abnormal persons, and he should keep by him (unless he wishes to forfeit his Fellowship) some convenient formula by which he may indicate at once the enormity of the subject and the disapproval of the writer. The writings of Lord Macaulay will furnish him at need with the necessary facility in lightning characterization. It was the practice of Cicero to label his contemporaries without distinction as "heavy men"; and the characters of history are easily divisible into "far-seeing statesmen" and "reckless libertines." It may be objected that although it is sufficient for the purposes of contemporary caricature

to represent Mr. Gladstone as a collar or Mr. Chamberlain as an eyeglass, it is an inadequate record for posterity. But it is impossible for a busy man to write history without formulæ, and after all sheep are sheep and goats are goats. Lord Macaulay once wrote of someone, "In private life he was stern, morose, and inexorable": he was probably a Dutchman. It is a passage which has served as a lasting model for the historian's treatment of character. I had always imagined that Cliché was a suburb of Paris, until I discovered it to be a street in Oxford. Thus, if the working historian is faced with a period of "deplorable excesses," he handles it like a man, and writes always as if he was illustrated with steel engravings:

"The imbecile king now ripened rapidly towards a crisis. Surrounded by a Court

in which the inanity of the day was rivalled only by the debauchery of the night, he became incapable towards the year 1472 of distinguishing good from evil, a fact which contributed considerably to the effectiveness of his foreign policy, but was hardly calculated to conform with the monastic traditions of his House. Long nights of drink and dicing weakened a constitution that was already undermined, and the council-table, where once Campo Santo had presided, was disfigured with the despicable apparatus of Bagatelle. The burghers of the capital were horrified by the wild laughter of his madcap courtiers, and when it was reported in London that Ladislas had played at Halma, the Court of St. James's received his envoy in the deepest ceremonial mourning."

That is precisely how it is done. The

passage exhibits the benign and contemporary influences of Lord Macaulay and Mr. Bowdler; and it contains all the necessary ingredients, except perhaps a "venal Chancellor" and a "greedy mistress." Vice is a subject of especial interest to historians, who are in most cases residents in small country towns; and there is unbounded truth in the rococo footnote of a writer on the Renaissance, who said *à propos* of a Pope: "The disgusting details of his vices smack somewhat of the morbid historian's lamp." The note itself is a fine example of that concrete visualization of the subject which led Macaulay to observe that in consequence of Frederick's invasion of Silesia "black men fought on the coast of Coromandel and red men scalped each other by the Great Lakes of North America."

A less exciting branch of the historian's

work is the reproduction of contemporary sayings and speeches. Thus, an obituary should always close on a note of regretful quotation :

" He lived in affluence and died in great pain. ' Thus,' it was said by the most eloquent of his contemporaries, ' thus terminated a career as varied as it was eventful, as strange as it was unique.' "

But for the longer efforts of sustained eloquence greater art is required. It is no longer usual, as in Thucydides' day, to compose completely new speeches, but it is permissible for the historian to heighten the colours and even to insert those rhetorical questions and complexes of personal pronouns which will render the translation of the

passage into Latin prose a work of consuming interest and lasting profit :

" The Duke assembled his companions for the forlorn hope, and addressed them briefly in *Oratio obliqua*. ' His father,' he said, ' had always cherished in his heart the idea that he would one day return to his own people. Had he fallen in vain ? Was it for nothing that they had dyed with their loyal blood the soil of a hundred battlefields ? The past was dead, the future was yet to come. Let them remember that great sacrifices were necessary for the attainment of great ends, let them think of their homes and families, and if they had any pity for an exile, an outcast, and an orphan, let them die fighting.' "

That is the kind of passage that used to

send the blood of Dr. Bradley coursing more quickly through his veins. The march of its eloquence, the solemnity of its sentiment, and the rich balance of its pronouns unite to make it a model for all historians: it can be adapted for any period.

It is hardly possible in a short study to include the special branches of the subject. Such are those efficient modern text-books, in which events are referred to either as "factors" (as if they were a sum) or as "phases" (as if they were the moon). There is also the solemn business of writing economic history, in which the historian may lapse at will into algebra, and anything not otherwise describable may be called "social tissue." A special subject is constituted by the early conquests of Southern and Central America. In these there is a uniform opening for all passages which runs:

"It was now the middle of October, and the season was drawing to an end. Soon the mountains would be whitened with the snows of winter and every rivulet swollen to a roaring torrent. Cortez, whose determination only increased with misfortune, decided to delay his march until the inclemency of the season abated. . . .

"It was now the middle of November, and the season was drawing to an end. . . ."

There is, finally, the method of military history. This may be patriotic, technical, or in the manner prophetically indicated by Virgil as *Belloc, horrida Belloc.* The finest exponent of the patriotic style is undoubtedly the Rev. W. H. Fitchett, a distinguished Colonial clergyman and historian of the Napoleonic wars. His night-attacks are more nocturnal and his scaling parties more

heroically scaligerous than those of any other writer; his drummer-boys are the most moving in my limited circle of drummer-boys. One gathers that the Peninsular War abounded in pleasing incident of this type:

"The Night Attack

"It was midnight when Staff-Surgeon Pettigrew showed the flare from the summit of Sombrero. At once the whole plain was alive with the hum of the great assault. The four columns speedily got into position with flares and bugles at the head of each. One made straight for the Watergate, a second for the Bailey-guard, a third for the Porter-house, and the last (led by the saintly Smeathe) for the Tube station. Let us follow the second column on its secret mission through the night, lit by torches and cheered on by the

huzzas of a thousand English throats. '—— the ——s,' cried Cocker in a voice hoarse with patriotism; at that moment a red-hot shot hurtled over the plain and, ricocheting treacherously from the frozen river, dashed the heroic leader to the ground. Captain Boffskin, of the Buffs, leapt up with the dry coughing howl of the British infantryman. '—— them,' he roared, '—— them to ——' and for the last fifty yards it was neck and neck with the ladders. Our gallant drummer-boys laid to again, but suddenly a shot rang out from the silent ramparts. The 94th Léger were awake. *We were discovered!*"

The war of 1870 required more special treatment. Its histories show no peculiar characteristic, but its appearances in fiction deserve special attention. There is a standard pattern:

"How the Prussians came to Guitry-le-sec

"It was a late afternoon in early September, or an early afternoon in late September—I forget these things—when I missed the boat express from Kerplouarnec to Pouzy-le-roi and was forced by the time-table to spend three hours at the forgotten hamlet of Guitry-le-sec, in the heart of Dauphiné. It contained, besides a quantity of underfed poultry, one white church, one white Mairie, and nine white houses. An old man with a white beard came towards me up the long white road. 'It was on just such an afternoon as this forty years ago,' he began, 'that . . . '

"'Stop!' I said sternly, 'I have met you in a previous existence. You are going to say that a solitary Uhlan appeared sharply

outlined against the sky behind M. Jules' farm.' He nodded feebly.

"'The red trousers had left the village half an hour before to look for the hated Prussian in the cafés of the neighbouring town. You were alone when the spiked helmets marched in. You can hear their shrieking fifes to this day.' He wept quietly.

"I went on. 'There was an officer with them, a proud, ugly man with a butter-coloured moustache. He saw the little Mimi and drove his coarse Suabian hand upward through his Mecklenburger moustache. You dropped on one knee. . . .' But he had fled.

"In the first of the three cafés I saw a second old man. 'Come in, Monsieur,' he said. I waited on the doorstep. 'It was on just such an afternoon. . . .' I went on. At the other two cafés two further old men attempted me with the story; I told the last

that he was rescued by Zouaves, and walked happily to the station, to read about Vichy Célestins until the train came in from the south."

The Russo-Japanese War is a more original subject and derives its particular flavour from the airy grace with which Sir Ian Hamilton has described it. Like this:

"WAO-WAO, *Jan.* 31.—The *rafale* was purring like a *mistral* as I shaved this morning. I wonder where it is; must ask ——. —— is a charming fellow with the face of a Baluchi Kashgai and a voice like a circular saw.

"11.40.—It was eleven-forty when I looked at my watch. The shrapnel-bursts look like a plantation of powder-puffs suspended in the sky. Victor says there is a battle going on: capital chap Victor.

"2 P.M.—Lunched with an American lady-doctor. How feminine the Americans can be.

"7 P.M.—A great day. It was Donkelsdorp over again. Substitute the Tenth Army for the Traffordshires' baggage waggon, swell Honks Spruit into the roaring Wang-ho, elevate Oom Kop into the frowning scarp of Pyjiyama, and you have it. The Staff were obviously gratified when I told them about Donkelsdorp.

"The Rooskis came over the crest-line in a huddle of massed battalions, and Gazeka was after them like a rat after a terrier. I knew that his horse-guns had no horses (a rule of the Japanese service to discourage unnecessary changing of ground), but his men bit the trails and dragged them up by their teeth. Slowly the Muscovites peeled off the steaming mountains and took the funicular down the other side.

"I wonder what my friend Smuts would make of the Yentai coal mine? Well, well.—'*Something accomplished, something done.*'"

The technical manner is more difficult of acquisition for the beginner, since it involves a knowledge of at least two European languages. It is a cardinal rule that all places should be described as *points d'appui*, the simple process of scouting looks far better as *Verschleierung*, and the adjective 'strategical' may be used without any meaning in front of any noun.

But the military manner was revolutionized by the war. Mr. Belloc created a new Land and a new Water. We know now why the Persian commanders demanded "earth and water" on their entrance into a Greek town; it was the weekly demand of the Great General Staff, as it called for its

favourite paper. Mr. Belloc has woven Baedeker and geometry into a new style: it is the last cry of Historians' English, because one was invented by a German and the other by a Greek.

M. ANATOLE FRANCE

It was one of those large rooms, all corners and *chiaroscuro*, which are not so much furnished as stocked with an assortment of rather strident historical allusions. The most respectful observer could hardly avoid noticing that the 'periods' had got a trifle mixed. It was all a little like the local colour in a costume novel by a popular favourite whose heart had got the better of her head, or the historical references of an impulsive statesman when his private secretary is away in the country.

The room had undeniably an air; but the air converged upon it from so many quarters as to amount almost to a succession of draughts. The more subdued *bric-à-brac* was

of Greek origin. But it was almost effaced by the high colouring of the Della Robbia family; and on the walls behind it there was a loud suggestion of tapestry. There were a few prints from another century; and in one corner of the room, where the ornaments stood in deep shadow, one detected the familiar whisper of the last enchantments of the Middle Age. Even the books were bound in bright parchment anachronisms; and the gilding on the chairs, in this pleasant welter of Florence and Tanagra and Hampton Court, was a gracious reminiscence of King Louis XVI. It was, in fine, just such a symphony of discordant styles as had tempted the poor lady in the story to "finger fondly the brasses that Louis Quinze might have thumbed, to sit with Venetian velvets just held in a loving palm, to hang over cases of enamels and pass and repass before

cabinets." And, as at Poynton, one hardly noticed the people, unless indeed one was so sensitive that one could not bear to look at the furniture. It was "the Things, always the splendid Things," that held the centre of the stage.

But there were a few people besides. They lurked about among the furniture, and for the most part they said extremely little. There was a young man, who said at intervals "*Cher maître*"; and the whole group converged visibly, with the respectful convergence of *coryphées* upon the *prima ballerina*, on an arresting figure. It was dressed with some care in the attractive uniform of a Continental sage. That is to say, it wore a dressing-gown of some bright colour with a gay silk skull-cap, which sat merrily above a long, familiar face. The face was old and a little sad, but rather charming; and a narrow beard made

it still longer. He moved about the room and talked at random; and at intervals the young man said "*Cher maître.*"

That expression has always seemed to be the compensation maliciously provided by an all-seeing Providence for the undue felicity of French men of letters. They have an assured standing; an admirable and uniform prose style may be acquired at almost any school; and their sick beds are frequently enlivened by the impending presence of a Minister of Fine Arts or even the President of the Republic, prepared to attach the insignia of the *Légion d'Honneur* to the night-clothes of the happy sufferer. They enjoy wise criticism, discreet publicity, and an Academy. But it is decreed by the mysterious checks and balances which order the universe that young men should address them as "*Cher maître.*" Almost tolerable, by com-

parison, is the ruder destiny of writers in an adjacent island, who travel through the dark void of English letters to the deeper obscurity of the Order of Merit. Ignored by a busy race which can memorize its Derby winners with its Kings of England, unknown to native statesmen who never hesitate for a batting average, they seem as insubstantial as the squeaking wraiths of Penelope's suitors. Their shadowy figures flit about the suburbs; their faint names are spoken uncertainly in circulating libraries. No Academy crowns their works; no critics 'place' them unerringly in an exact hierarchy of letters; no respectful deputations crowd their obscure death-beds. Theirs is a singularly humble lot. But when their fellow-countrymen speak to them (to ask the time, it may be, or to invite their opinions on Cup-tie prospects), they call them by their own names. For,

by the great mercy of heaven, there is no English for "*Cher maître.*"

One seems always to detect something a shade depressing about the flavour of the incense that is offered to successful men of letters. There, in the large room, was an inimitably frivolous old gentleman who had smiled discreetly at half the things in life. He had smiled at learning. He had smiled, a little bitterly, at love. He had smiled, in two large volumes, at Joan of Arc; and he had smiled, in a parable of bird life and an exquisite tetralogy, at the history of his own country. When he came to his own memories, he almost forgot to smile. But during a long life he had abounded in irony, in that quality without which (as he once wrote) "*le monde serait comme une forêt sans oiseaux,*" which is (as he defined it) "*la gaieté de la réflexion et la joie de la sagesse.*" He had reflected his

mood in the still waters of a perfectly transparent style, which was like "*une grande glace sans défaut dont le mérite est de laisser tout voir sans paraître elle-même.*" And yet, at the end of it all, he was discoursing vaguely in a large room to a respectful company, which tried hard to remember each of his sayings and took them quite literally. Approving Boswells beamed at the end of every sentence, and eternal truths were detected in each casual reply. That was, perhaps, the greatest irony of all.

There is something almost tragic about the old age of humorists. This, one always feels, is the kind of figure about which they could have been so funny twenty years ago. And now they no longer see, because they have themselves become, the joke. The delightful greybeard strayed about among his *bric-à-brac* and talked profoundly, whilst

the young man in the corner called him "*Cher maître.*" Was it for this, one wonders, that he had pointed fingers of polite derision at smart ladies and grubby poets, that he smiled that sharp smile of his at the Republic itself and even at the sacred Revolution from which it sprang? He seems so mild, surrounded by his visitors. Yet he has shrugged amiably at love and death. He has been disrespectful about fashion and M. Émile Zola. He has smiled at pride and pedantry and faith.

But when he smiled at faith, it was an indulgent smile. His wit is rarely cutting with a Bishop, and he becomes almost tender with a Father of the Church. These simple figures may provoke him to a mild regret—"*les martyres manquent d'ironie et c'est là un défaut impardonnable.*" But he seems to finger their copes and their chasubles and their

rags with a lingering affection. How often he has returned from other fields to their quiet neighbourhood. He would write about the great world and all the clever gentlemen in Paris. But at the end of it he seemed always to escape with visible relief into the less exacting company of a saint. He was more at ease in the bright sunshine and simple notions of the Third Century; and although he might sometimes get as far as Florence, he was generally to be found in the Thebaid.

It is a queer predilection; and one is a little apt to stare, as the erudite unbeliever prostrates himself with earnest regularity at the empty shrines of other men's beliefs. "*Son athéisme,*" as he once wrote of a dull poet, "*est si pieux, qu'il a semblé chrétien à certaines personnes croyantes.*" Indeed, the casual reader of his work might well mistake

him for a Christian apologist with an unusual turn of style. He is always murmuring the blessed catalogue of the martyrs; and he deviates at the least excuse into the early history of the religion to which he has vowed disobedience. There is something odd about the weakness which irreligious men feel for religion. Almost invariably it becomes their favourite topic. When a novelist abjures the Church, one may be certain that his future work will teem with martyrs and pullulate with theological *finesse*. The literary Thebaid is full of the lonely cells of unbelieving and almost intolerably holy men. Religion, by some queer revenge, seems to haunt them perpetually; and these unbelievers return to it with the harping eagerness of a missionary, until to the normal man their obsession becomes almost monotonous.

So much of his work is touched with that

quaint infection that this piety of his—*son athéisme si pieux*—becomes its foremost feature. One half forgets the ambling charm of his humour and the fine sweep of his vision of history in this continual fingering of Early Christian relics. The indefatigable pietist is perpetually rolling out his deep Gregorians or polishing the jewels on his reliquary. His busy fancy flits from saint to saint, and Church music is the constant accompaniment of his anti-clericalism. He is a persevering unbeliever and a regular non-attendant at public worship. Yet, in spite of it all, this conscientious secularist cannot help intoning *À bas la calotte* in antiphones. It is an odd Nemesis.

One is left wondering how that enlightened imagination got its queer twist, why this fine intelligence is haunted by the unfascinating little figures which populate the early

history of the Church. Perhaps they have one attraction which might draw a Frenchman. Almost incapable of realizing any foreigner and always prone to envisage the East as a comprehensive and mysterious region known as *les Indes*, the Gaul is infinitely sensitive to any product of French territory. That may explain his predilection for the early phase of Christian history, when the holy men sat in the sunshine by the Nile and the little white shrines took the African glare at midday. For Christianity, in that stage, was almost an Algerian phenomenon. St. Anthony was an inspired *fellah* ; and one may almost see the early Fathers as Christian *marabouts*. The hot still distances of the Thebaid have the true flavour of North Africa, and a Frenchman might safely investigate its queer inmates without finding himself in unfamiliar country.

But even that can hardly explain the

strange attraction. The problem still remains of the wise, modern eclectic staring in fascination at the gesticulating little figures in the sunshine of the Third Century. There is nothing Athenian about them, and not much that is Roman. For they have no style and very little logic. But something about them appears to stir a vague envy in their sage posterity . . . "*la foi s'en est allée. Nous n'avons plus d'espérances et nous ne croyons plus à ce qui consolait nos pères. Cela surtout nous est pénible. Car il était doux de croire même à l'enfer.*" The irony seems to fade out of it; and one is left with the dejected heir of all the ages craving for one, just one untruth to shield him from the naked and intolerable glare of reality. That, perhaps, is why he haunts the unenlightened company of bigots. He might have moved among his own omniscient contemporaries or the wise

men who twisted words in Athens. But he preferred the saints. They have the primitive virtues; and life is, for them, so infinitely more simple. *Car il était doux de croire même à l'enfer.* So, by a pleasant irony, the unbeliever turned pietist. And perhaps the irony was not his own.

MR. HENRY JAMES

THE sensitive person, if he is still alive, must be having a most disturbing time. One fancies the poor gentleman, with his fine *flair* for consistency and his exact eye for an historical parallel, a trifle out of breath in the Revue of Revues in which it is our present privilege to live. Parties and principles join hands and whirl round him in a ragtime *Carmagnole*; and even the solemn processes of the Constitution, having been set to the syncopated goose-step of the Defence of the Realm Regulations, can never be completely relied on again. Indeed, he resembles more than a little as he blinks his way across the contemporary stage, that "ancient, contemplative person" whose reminiscent bath-chair was trundled by Mr.

Henry James through the stamp and thunder of *The American Scene.*

But of all his senses it is the hearing that has been most cruelly assaulted by the Saturnalia *de nos jours.* For the first months after the outbreak of war it vibrated painfully to the chest-notes of our leading thinkers on other subjects attuning themselves indefatigably to the new European accompaniment. Then for a short but harrowing period the national intelligence was at the mercy of any Boanerges that could command a luncheon-club and a reporter. In a later phase, as the war dropped to a deeper note and enemy action checked the free import of paper-making materials, his ears reverberated with the invitations of the organ-voice of England to tuck in his twopenny (or, as it has since become, his threepenny). Followed a sound of breaking window-glass and the

voice of one Billing in the wilderness. And so the shifting voices of the war passed painfully through his hearing into history. It must have seemed sometimes to the listener like the dreary study by a sleepless man of the stages of sound which carry last night into to-morrow, the gradual change from the crowded and confidential voices of late evening to the loud and scattered talkers of the first small hours and from them to the quiet of the middle night, the miscalculations of premature and inaccurate poultry, the first light, and the earliest horse. With the great dawn of the armistice he could hear the normal traffic of the world passing his windows again, and the hoofs of all the hacks in England began to rattle noisily over the cobble-stones to the cheerful clatter of Sir James Barrie's cans as he went round with the milk of human kindness.

But before the reviving national voices had recovered their full strength they were interpenetrated and almost drowned by a new note of a deeper and more sinister pitch. The *cri du* coroner, which started its unobtrusive undertone in the remoter corners of the newspapers, swelled gradually fuller and louder and deeper until at last, dominating every competing voice, it rolled from shore to shore with the proud resonance of an accompanist that has succeeded in submerging the solo.

It is not so long since the late Lord Tennyson warned his fellow-countrymen that kind hearts are more than coroners; and it is hardly surprising that a public, which has always disregarded its poets, appears recently to have enthroned its coroners at an unprecedented altitude. Their *obiter dicta*, their lightest ejaculations, their considerate announcements

of forthcoming attractions secured for the next sitting have been quoted with a volume of publicity that must be unspeakably distasteful to those reticent men. But persevering doggedly in face of the discouragements offered by verbatim reports and sketching in court, those *macabre* exponents of medical jurisprudence, whose surroundings combine the attractions of an operating theatre with the fascination of the Third Degree, did and more than did the duty which England expected of them. There was an ugly rush of Daniels come to judgment, and the Peace Conference was triumphantly elbowed into those quiet corners of the paper in which the attention of sub-editors is alternately wooed by the disturbing progress of bee-disease in the Isle of Wight and the gratifying longevity of maiden ladies in Herefordshire. The public mind was com-

pletely obsessed. Impressionable lovers shocked one another by writing that dope deferred maketh the heart sick; and it is even said that a schoolboy, whose passion for topicality had recently involved him in serious trouble for translating *In hoc signo vinces*, that fiery message of the firmament to the pious Emperor, by the still more startling sky-sign, "That's the stuff to give them," was ordered to write twenty cantos of Dante in a round hand as a penalty for the suggestion that the gates of the Inferno were superscribed "All dope abandon, ye who enter here."

The period was in every way a wearing one for the national intelligence; but the worst of it has yet to be described. A few months earlier the coroner spirit, speaking with a slight but noticeable American accent, had invaded the quiet chambers of literary

criticism, and the inquest was on Henry James. It was conducted in a discreet periodical with an orange cover by a number of distinguished members of our inmost *intelligentzia*, who maintained throughout the proceedings (which were somewhat painful), the perfect assurance of a *juge d'instruction* with a corpse up his sleeve. They were so thoroughly determined to " sit on " the body, as our dear author would have said, nudging us with his inimitably knowing inverted commas at the little colloquialism ; and from certain passages in the summing-up they appeared to be inviting the jury to find that, in deference to the popular taste for excess in anæsthetics, the end had been due to æsthetics improperly administered.

There are great parts of Mr. Ezra Pound's roomy rather than voluminous *constatation*

that, in his own austere phrase, "I must reject according to my lights as bad writing; another part is a specialité, a pleasure for certain temperaments only." One regrets that one cannot share it. There is a passage of delirious merriment about the *Notes on Novelists*:

"The *Times* Literary Supplement had got so groggy that something had to be done. Orders went forth from Shushan wherein is the palace that 'something had to be done.' The 'Lit. Sup.' was on the blink; on the blink so shockin' an' staggerin' that something had to be done to boost up its giddy prestige. There were but two spotless paladins, two giddy Galahads available—Henry James and the impeccable Beerbohm. So Max and the great stylist were tackled, cajoled, bribed, wheedled, and what not. And the *Notes on*

Novelists were 'got out of the late Henry somehow, after all.'"

No.

Or, again, the following selection from the thoughts that rise in Mr. Pound on confrontation with one of the later novels:

"The *Awkward Age*, fairy godmother and spotless lamb and all the rest of it. . . . Opening *tour de force*, a study in punks, a cheese *soufflé* of the leprous crust of society done to a turn and a niceness save when he puts on the *dulcissimo, vox humana*, stop. . . . These timbres and tonalities are his stronghold; he is ignorant of nearly everything else. It is all very well to say that modern life is largely made up of vellities, atmospheres, timbres, nuances, etc., but if people really spent as much time fussing, to the extent

of the Jamesian fuss, about such normal, trifling, age-old affairs as slight inclinations to adultery, slight disinclinations to marry, to refrain from marrying, etc., etc., life would scarcely be worth the bother of keeping on with it. It is also contendable that one must depict such mush in order to abolish it."

This, with great respect—as one should say when one rises to interrupt a runaway coroner—is the merest literary jazz, with trap-drums banging, tin trays clashing, and the inspiriting ululations of all that splendid battery of sound producers with which the virility of a New World has enlivened the declining art of music.

But, apart from these distressing orchestral effects and a somewhat disjointed series of staccato notes which leave one with the misleading impression that Mr. Pound's shirt-

cuffs have been sent to the printer instead of to the laundress, there is an admirable residuum of hard, if somewhat loose-limbed, thinking. The Little Reviewers have worked conscientiously over the whole splendid ground ; and one's only complaint must be that, confronted with the body of an author's completed works, they profess almost to a man to see the deepest significance in the fragments : it is a bad habit which they may have learnt from some of our Grecians. And having in this manner established their reputation as earnest scholars, they proceed to maintain it by passing almost completely over the humour of Henry James. There is that splendid spoof account in *The American Scene* of how the United States came to be started because of the peculiar aptness of the fittings and fixtures of a room in Philadelphia for some such occasion :

" One fancies, under the high spring of the ceiling and before the great embrasured window-sashes of the principal room, some clever man of the period, after a long look round, taking the hint. ' What an admirable place for a Declaration of something ! What could one here—what couldn't one really declare ? ' And then, after a moment : ' I say, why not our Independence ?—capital thing always to declare, and before any one gets in with anything tactless. You'll see that the fortune of the place will be made.' "

Henry James initiating the American Revolution on grounds of pure upholstery is a magnificent picture, although one realizes how offensive it must be to Mr. Pound, who is continually anathematizing his " dam'd fuss about furniture." Indeed, it is a bias against the " minor mundanities," and the tendency

to "*conspuer* . . . Henry James' concern with furniture, the Spoils of Poynton, connoisseurship, Mrs. Ward's tea-party atmosphere, the young Bostonian of the immature novels," that seem to have led these students into their gravest critical error. The work of the middle James in the years between 1889 and 1900 is dismissed with an intellectual curse as "this entoilment in the Yellow Book, short sentences, and the epigrammatic." It is a pity, because to another judgment it appears his best.

The work of Henry James has always seemed divisible by a simple dynastic arrangement into three reigns: James I, James II, and the Old Pretender. It is perhaps inevitable that the most bigoted Jacobites should cling closest to the Old Pretender; but whilst one applauds their loyalty, one can hardly defer to those critics who prefer the splendid rococo

of the decadence to the rich purity of the prime. Strikingly small in number are the adherents of James I, a simple, cultured monarch ruling over a kingdom which must have consisted principally of the Atlantic Ocean, because it was bounded on the East by Paris and on the West by Back Bay. In the next reign the King handled his sceptre of language with a perfect control of his subjects and of the treatment which he royally accorded to them. With the discovery by James of the fatal art of dictation about the year of Queen Victoria's second Jubilee, he passed into history and the throne was claimed by the Old Pretender. He was the most engaging claimant that had ever planned a descent on England; but his career, as one reads it, was a long struggle to get back to something that he had somehow, somewhere lost. It was the art of his predecessors, the

deft and gracious handling of English words for the rendering of transparent thought; and it is with something more than a desire to irritate Mr. Pound (and perhaps also Sir Edward Carson) that one may say that the greatest of the three was James II.

MR. THOMAS HARDY

British criticism, in spite of the lively young gentlemen who write the reviews for the newspapers, has always shown a becoming respect for its elders. One is perpetually giving up one's seat in the intellectual omnibus to veterans, who sink into it breathing heavily (and, not infrequently, without saying "Thank you"); and there has been quite an orgy of little presentations to old gentlemen on behalf of the Younger Generation—occasions on which it is to be feared that tact on both sides was strained to breaking point, because the old gentlemen had hardly realized that they were quite so old as all that, and the Younger Generation,

when it was shown in, seemed a shade balder than their host had been led to hope.

Age, at any rate, has had its due; and quite a number of bath-chairs have been wheeled respectfully up the easy gradients of the British Parnassus. It is a form of good manners in which the people of these islands appear to excel, possibly because, in the highest degree, it combines sentimentality with cheapness. It is so obviously a less expensive matter to crown an established reputation with a handful of bay-leaves out of the garden than to stand Chatterton a square meal; and there is something about the process that is a trifle more flattering to the national vanity. The English have always preferred their young geniuses starving, and almost from the beginning they have specialized in Grand Old Men. It is less, perhaps, an inverted

form of "Beaver" than an odd survival of their primeval taste for Druids.

Public attention in these islands is always assured for veteran statesmen or venerable poets. The national oracles, it would seem, are uniformly recruited from the superannuation list; and opinion is almost entirely formed by the rude forefathers of the hamlet talking in their sleep, whilst their shrines at Hawarden or Farringford are crowded with eager devotees. It is an unhealthy tendency, since it has stimulated in persons anxious to secure the public ear a morbid affectation of senility. The sprightly figures, which our political parties carry before them into battle, have adopted almost to a man a remarkable (and nearly identical) disguise, consisting of a great deal of very long, white hair, because they recognized—with some reluctance in the case of Mr. Churchill—that this evidence

of extreme age was the sole passport to their countrymen's respect.

Its influence in letters has been still more unhappy. The craving for tribal elders is satisfied in Wales by the simple-minded expedient of a direct impersonation of Druids at an annual charade. North of the Border they meet it with strange nocturnal incantations at the shrine of Robert Burns. But in England, where the spectacle of old gentlemen in night-shirts has always been considered ridiculous and nobody has ever succeeded in retaining the name of a deceased poet for ten years after his death, it affects criticism in a different and perhaps more sinister way and sets us all spotting *doyens*. In the absence of an Academy (and even the carefully selected senility of the Order of Merit is no real substitute) British opinion is perpetually engaged in recruiting octo-

genarians whom it can acclaim in a nice low voice as the greatest living practitioners of some one or other of the arts. Like that school of novelists in the last century which suffered from a morbid predilection for the last specimen of any species (whether of Mohicans or Days of Pompeii), the British critic is always out mammoth-hunting. Contemporary gadflies are popped into the killing bottle and forgotten. But his elephant-gun is always ready, his glass is always sweeping the skyline for the great humped back, the curling tusks, the trunk, the lumbering, heavy tread of the Last, the very last of the Great Victorians. Indeed, it saves an infinite deal of trouble when this interesting specimen has had the courtesy to get inside a glacier and die. One can analyse and appreciate so much more conveniently when the writer has ceased writing. Then

we are sure of him ; and the impressive figure can be enthroned as a Master, a *doyen*, and a warning to all young people with pen and ink who feel inclined to write before they are turned eighty.

British criticism is largely given over to the erection of these melancholy totems ; and it has been one of the liveliest spectacles of the past few years to watch Mr. Thomas Hardy eluding their efforts. An obvious victim, with his long and glorious achievement and his crown of years, he has obstinately refused to be caught and stuffed. The first essential of a literary totem is that he should leave off writing ; one must be able to refer to his work in a past tense. But Mr. Hardy, who might take his ease and sniff the incense as a *doyen*, a great name, a fragment of the past, remains a writer. It is not many months since he took the water once again in a volume

of verse with a truculent Jolly Roger at the main, that warned all critics to stand by and dip their colours. That is a brave encouragement to every man who faces the universe with a pen in his hand, a finer evening to the long day than any golden glow of retrospect. Mr. Hardy is not the last of any species, least of all of the Victorians; but his contemporaries may honour him as a contemporary, without the faint condescension which one reserves for relics, as the first and greatest of the Georgians.

Yet if one's first verse was written in 1865, when Lord Palmerston was the Queen's Minister, and one's first novel was reviewed in 1871, almost a decade before Disraeli's last, there is bound to be some flavour of the past about the work. You will not find it where the birds wheel slowly above the great brown face of Egdon Heath. There is

nothing that bears date in the cruel, dragging death of the Mayor of Casterbridge, unless it is the date of *Œdipus* and *King Lear*, and the ages when tragedy was not afraid to speak with a full voice. Perhaps there is a faint *démodé* touch of moral squeamishness in Tess, a mincing quality in some of his great ladies which you will hardly find in the modern young person and her mistress. But, then, Wessex is far away from towns—a long walk from the colleges at Christminster, and further still from London ; and things change slowly in the country. There is a strangely modern quality in Mr. Hardy's stories, a touch of the hardness which mild-eyed mothers are meeting in their daughters and staid Victorian critics reproved in Mr. Hardy. The wry smile with which he watches life, sitting behind his hedge to see the crowds go by, go singing up the lane that leads to the

rough moors and sometimes to the steep drop by the old quarry, is not old-fashioned. His philosophy may not be cheering; honest philosophies rarely are. But it is not out of date. The quiet glee with which he observes his fellow-creatures going to their doom is not an old man's pessimism. It is the youthful temper which moves small boys to spasms of secret laughter, when their elders majestically navigate a road that leads to an inevitable, an ineluctable butter-slide. The world, to Mr. Hardy, is one long lane that leads to an eternal booby-trap; and the enjoyment which he derives from sitting behind the hedge and watching the victims go past, is unfailing, if not particularly infectious.

Perhaps there is one corner of his work which is flecked with grey, which seems to bear in legible figures the date at which it was written. The fine truculent face which he

turns towards established religion has something in its look of the stern negation of the last century, of that singular crusade in which men solemnly took no Cross and rode out to establish the Faith that there was no faith. No dogma was ever so rigid as the agnostic's ; and one may sometimes catch in Mr. Hardy's utterance a note of that empty catechism, an echo of those hollow pulpits. He seems to deny, as though denial were a new and daring faith, a discovery by men who had sailed into unknown seas and found there was nothing. It is his one concession to the *Zeitgeist* of his own generation. Perhaps he learnt it when he was a church architect in the Sixties : it would not be easy to combine faith with the construction of country churches in the Victorian Gothic.

For nearly thirty years, while strange new stars have climbed the sky and dipped

and faded, his row of novels has stood on English shelves without a new one at the right-hand end. Someone in 1895 was shocked by *Jude*. England could stand the Yellow Book, but pulled long faces when unbelief ceased to be an affectation and became a creed. So Mr. Hardy withdrew into the blameless paths of poetry. The authority of Lord Tennyson could be quoted for the expression of honest doubt in that medium; and it was not felt that he was subverting the foundations of the State, when his sardonic anecdotes were retailed in *staccato* metre.

Often he seemed merely to play over his old pieces on a different instrument. The poem was, in many cases, a study for a novel, a little drawing for the great cartoon. But once, at least, in the years when King Edward reigned and a Mr. Austin was his Laureate,

Mr. Hardy played in the full tones which Browning had caught rolling from Abt Vogler's manual, with every stop full out and a great surge of sound above the little congregation. *The Dynasts* was decorated with the forbidding description of "an epic drama." In reality it was a chronicle play of the Great War of which the Trumpet-Major had seen something, with Napoleon for its principal and half Europe for its stage. Written in French, it would have been crowned by the Academy, nationalized, State-endowed, and played annually by two Divisions at the Camp of Châlons. In Germany, they would have built something vast for Reinhardt to produce it in. In Russian, it would have made an English reputation. But solemn ladies continued to labour through *War and Peace* without a notion that an Englishman had caught the stamp and

thunder of ten years of history in the great roll of a tragedy. It was an achievement on the fullest scale, in the Grand Manner, of the very first importance. And it was barely noticed. Even the young gentlemen, who hasten to Dorchester in the vain attempt to catch and canonize Mr. Hardy, are inclined to reserve their panegyrics for the strange, halting music of his shorter pieces, when the great tragedy stands there as the last and largest achievement of a master of two mediums.

MR. RUDYARD KIPLING

THERE is, there was always, a certain remoteness about Mr. Rudyard Kipling. His imagination played perpetually round the ends of the earth. His earliest works were imported in blue-grey paper covers from Allahabad. Even his name came from Staffordshire. He specialized in the outer edges of Mercator's Projection, in Lungtungpen and Mandalay and those miraculous regions east of Suez where Queen Victoria's writ ran a trifle uncertainly. He even went so far afield (it was an incredible achievement in the heyday of Mrs. Humphry Ward) as to have an American public. In a generation which regarded stories of Scottish life as travellers' tales from the far North he

extended the public imagination to broad and distant horizons; and, taking whole degrees of latitude in his stride, he jerked a familiar thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the Equator, a Pole or so, and all the uncomfortable wonders of the world which lie outside the Temperate Zone. It became his mission to convince his fellow-subjects that the British Empire was an ideal and not merely an accident, and that the oddly dressed equestrians with dark faces, who rode in the cavalcade of Queen Victoria's second Jubilee, possessed a significance beyond that normally attributed to them by the proprietors of circuses. It was a high theme, which took him up and down the map, and even into agreement with Mr. Joseph Chamberlain.

But his remoteness in place was more than equalled by his remoteness, as one looks at

him now, in point of time. The Dinosaurus, one feels, can give points in modernity to Mr. Kipling. After all, it is on speaking terms with Mr. H. G. Wells. But the author of *Soldiers Three* seems to belong to an age of almost fabulous antiquity. His flag, his Queen, his soldiers are the vague figures of a mythology that is rapidly fading into folklore. His political message has a dim interest for research students. And patient excavation will, no doubt, confirm many of the statements that are found to be in his text. The old, flamboyant Anglo-Saxon challenge to the inferior peoples of the earth went under, long before Mr. Kipling had a grey hair, in the dreary watches of the South African War. It was seen in that dismal winter of 1899 that the dashing subaltern of his dreams was not even an infallible master of his own profession. It was feared that the British

soldier was even capable of fighting on the wrong side. And when the South African Constitution handsomely admitted as much, there was no place in Mr. Kipling's scheme for Louis Botha and Jan Smuts. The Imperial ideal wilted through the long years between the Peace of Vereeniging and the outbreak in 1914 of a life-size war. The White Man grew more interested in his own highly complicated affairs than in his Burden ; and gradually British opinion came to regard a Labour leader as a more important person than a retired proconsul. It was, for Lord Curzon, Lord Milner, and Lord Cromer as well as for Mr. Kipling, an embittering interlude. Then, as they say in novels when the author feels an acute need for a change of scene, the war came ; and when it went, it left behind a dismal world groping for some cohesion among the broken pieces, snatching

hungrily at any fragment of common organization, but profoundly unfriendly to the old, self-seeking gesture which had painted the map red. Perhaps the map seemed quite red enough after the war. Three Empires had been hissed off the stage, and there was a sharp drop in Imperial quotations on the world market. The old ideals were looking a little guilty, even when they spoke perfect English; and there was an uneasy suspicion that the gleam which Mr. Kipling had followed was the silver gleam of an eagle perched on an old man's helmet among the trees at Doorn.

But as one turns the page and passes into Mr. Kipling's kingdom, one is centuries away from the pale uncertainties, the dingy, poor-spirited doubts of the world we live in. The Queen is on her throne again at Windsor; her sentries pace up and down the world;

and the secrets of the universe fall open at the command of a cocksure young man in spectacles with a large moustache, "a strangely clever youth," as a startled commentator observed him, "who has stolen the formidable mask of maturity and rushes about making people jump with the deep sounds, the sportive exaggerations of tone, that issue from its painted lips." There is something which must remind one of Gulliver among the largest and most majestic of his hosts in the spectacle of Mr. Henry James turning that solemn microscope on Mr. Kipling. Yet the criticism (it is in a forgotten preface of an obscure American volume) contains the wisest enumeration of Mr. Kipling's qualities. "His extreme youth is indeed what I may call his window-bar—the support on which he somewhat rowdily leans while he looks down at the human scene with

his pipe in his teeth; just as his other conditions (to mention only some of them) are his prodigious facility, which is only less remarkable than his stiff selection; his unabashed temperament, his flexible talent, his smoking-room manner, his familiar friendship with India—established so rapidly, and so completely under his control; his delight in battle, his 'cheek' about women—and indeed about men and about everything; his determination not to be duped, his 'imperial' fibre, his love of the inside view, the private soldier, and the primitive man." The whole of Mr. Kipling is to be found somewhere along the branches of that ramifying sentence. It has been written more than thirty years; and in the interval familiarity with India has taken in another continent or so; the flexible talent has been bent to verse, to prophecy, to ancient history, to the

elusive pursuit of English landscape; and the prodigious facility, alas! has run dry. But the smoking-room manner, the love of the inside view, remained constant; and criticism, through the mouth of Mr. Henry James in 1891, had said its last word on Mr. Kipling.

Technically, of course, his achievement has been astounding. He handled the foils in the short story with unparalleled skill; and as a stylist he enlarged the limits of the English language with all the gusto of an Empire-builder planting the flag in undiscovered regions. But not all his conquests (one has noticed the same weakness among Empire-builders) were of equal value. His contribution to the poetic vocabulary seemed principally to consist in scraps of Hindustani, the simple litany of the blaspheming soldier, and the deeper tone of the Authorized

Version (O.T.). By persons unfamiliar with the original Mr. Kipling is frequently admired for qualities which should be attributed with greater accuracy to the Jacobean translator of the Book of Psalms. But one feels that as a poet he found the English language marble and left it stucco. The new building material is at once cheaper to get and easier to handle ; and his introduction of it on the market has brought poetic composition within the means of persons who should never have been able to afford a Rhyming Dictionary. Perhaps his imitators are the gravest wrong which Mr. Kipling has inflicted upon his country's literature.

But his contribution to English prose is more serious. That instrument, since English falls naturally into poetry just as French falls into prose and German into ballads, is perhaps the most difficult to play

upon in the whole range of language. Mr. Kipling played on his instrument with queer, *staccato* jerks and sudden discords. There were new notes in it which shocked the old concert-goers; and to some hearers the music seems sometimes to degenerate into mere noise. But his touch was astonishingly sure, and he played on the English language an air which had never been heard before. One may say that under his hand the instrument of prose lost some of its deeper notes, grew shriller, often trailed away into discord. But it rendered strange airs which could never have come over the old strings, and Mr. Kipling left it the richer and the better for his innovations.

It is easy enough to find his stale politics ridiculous or to see, with Mr. Beerbohm, an ineluctable vulgarity in the perpetual knowingness of his unchanging wink. But Mr.

Kipling, in his true perspective, is something more than a warning to young poets or a monument of late-Victorian Imperialism. He sharpened the English language to a knife-edge, and with it he has cut brilliant patterns on the surface of our prose literature. At least two of the best stories in the world are somewhere behind that line of red book-backs; and scattered up and down inside the books are scores of vivid little etchings, fit for a place in any portfolio—blazing sunlight, some seascapes of the North Atlantic, frontier fighting, a dozen men, some women, and one doleful little boy. He has made his contribution to letters; and one day, when the new voices are less insistent and through a silence we can catch his strange halting tones, it will be remembered.

SIR JAMES BARRIE

In the first place, of course, Queen Anne was to blame. It was a direct consequence of one of the few legislative indiscretions of that blameless reign. You have only to read the preamble (it fills a trifle under nine pages in the " Statutes at Large ") of " an Act for the Union of the two Kingdoms of *England* and *Scotland* " to detect, beneath an apparently harmless drone of formal legislation, the beginnings of the trouble. The grave words in their dignified context on the yellow page seem meaningless enough. The Augustan drafting committee, in their high heels and their tall perukes, may have meant no harm. But behind their empty periods one seems to catch a sudden, disconcerting glint of red hair,

of eager, determined eyes, of the slow gathering of the clans for that last and most successful foray over the Border into the defenceless English counties. The Act of Union (one can read it in every line) prepared the pervasion of English life by Scotsmen.

So, in the first instance, Queen Anne was to blame. But she has an obvious excuse, because her claim to the customary indulgence *de mortuis* is, if anything, a trifle stronger than most people's. In any case the pass which she had sold to the invader was not seriously congested by south-bound traffic during the Eighteenth Century. Such incursions as were organized (under the auspices of the House of Stuart) were firmly thrown back into Scotland, the form assumed by English criticism being normally a row of spikes over a gateway for the reception of Scottish heads. And even when the drastic immigration policy

of this more than Ellis Island was eluded by the furtive entry of individual Scotsmen, England continued to regard them with unconcealed distaste. They grossly mispronounced the language; their country was known to be of a grotesque and barbarous poverty; and they were not even foreigners. One might tolerate the presence in a polite circle of a dapper Mounseer or a learned German; but the constant company of a Scotsman was something that only the massive patience of the Doctor could bear—and even that had been known to give way on occasion.

For that reason one read with a thrill of mild surprise the astonishing claim of a Scots Rector at St. Andrews. He was addressing a passionately local audience in the full intellectual idiom of the Gael. There was a copious appeal to that light, unearthly fancy of which a monopoly is supposed to reside in

the untidier portions of the Celtic fringe; the names of local worthies — Montrose, M'Connachie, Hamilton—abounded in provincial profusion; and there was that mild sprinkling of Scottish colloquialisms — "fleggit" and "flichtered" — which is always intended to put the Englishman off his sentence. But in the midst of it all, among the little nudging references and the persevering elfishness and the light brush of sentiment that is like the soft sweep of showers among Northern hills, there came the astounding phrase, "our glorious Johnson." One hardly dares to conjecture what was said in Elysium that afternoon under the tree where so many of them always gather for polite conversation—Mr. Garrick and Mr. Wilkes and Mr. Topham Beauclerk and Sir Joshua and Mr. Boswell, who takes no more little notes now because his memory is perfect at last. It was in May

that the dreadful words were spoken at St. Andrews; and that May there was thunder from a clear sky. "Our glorious Johnson" . . . Scottish acquisitiveness could surely go no further.

The embargo on Scotsmen lasted and almost survived the Eighteenth Century. The long reign of Sir Walter did something to lift the ban. But the majority of his countrymen were found to be lamentably unlike him; and the repulsive dialect in which Mr. Carlyle elected to commune with his Maker in the presence of his startled readers did much to restore the old attitude of exclusion. The popularity of Scotland was long delayed. Late in the reign of Queen Victoria, when Mr. Meredith had exposed to the full the feelings of a perfect gentleman and Mr. Henry James had explored the furthest recesses of refined persons, there came a

sudden interest in the simpler ornaments of the British countryside. Young ladies in circulating libraries went tripping westward with Mr. Hardy, went further west with Mr. William Black. Every county (in some parts of the country the industry has survived into our own time) was found to be good for at least one novel. The Muse of fiction was hastily fitted for a sun-bonnet; bare arms replaced the naked souls of an earlier fashion, whilst eager literary hands substituted the cow-shed for the drawing-room. Somewhere between the milk-pails and the *patois* a Scottish vogue crept in; the sentiment of peasant characters could be relied on to be sound; and the close proximity of Balmoral seemed almost to give royal sanction to the mode.

England turned a patient ear to interminable narratives of the slow journey of small-

holders from the cradle to the grave; and their conversation was couched in an alarming idiom, in which the wildest misprints were barely noticeable. Somewhere in this strange movement Mr. Barrie had his beginnings. His work displayed a welcome brevity, and there was a pleasing play of mild sentiment. But he was far as yet, whilst his imagination still hung round Kirriemuir, from Baronetcy and the still more select company of the Order of Merit. Those bright perspectives did not beckon, until he had transferred himself from the publisher's waiting-room to the stage door. In his first phase Mr. Barrie was only one writer among several, a friend of Henley, a delicate *staccato* little pen from Scotland. But his second career, among the draughts and bouquets of the London theatre, took him much further.

"Very soon," as he once told some under-

graduates, "you will be Victorian or that sort of thing yourselves; next session probably, when the freshmen come up." As a dramatist Sir James Barrie is (one says it without disparagement of a great age) essentially Edwardian. It is true that he produced two plays before Queen Victoria died; and his ennoblement was at the hands of King George. But the great mass of his dramatic work, the first sustained roar of public appreciation, whose echoes reverberate annually in the ritual revival of a children's play, all fell within the reign of King Edward VII. One year of it alone saw him launch three new plays; and very soon that small, unobtrusive figure with a large pipe (one knew so little about him, except that he smoked too much) had unintentionally elbowed his competitors into obscurity at the side of the stage. He became the

anointed king of the English theatre; although for the most part he was, like that elusive figure of Mr. H. G. Wells' theology, an invisible king. It was a queer apotheosis.

His appeal to the age of King Edward was almost irresistible. It was a slightly jaded time, when the public taste turned wearily in the direction of a sweet, an almost too sweet simplicity. The fevered, *fin de siècle* young gentlemen of the Yellow Book had given it all the sensations; the facile worldliness of Mr. Pinero and Mr. Henry Arthur Jones had taught it all that could be known about life. It had exhausted the possibilities of chrysoprase and hermaphrodites; and it had seen every permutation of two men and a woman. The subjects of Edward VII, like the languid courtiers of Louis XVI, were ready for buttercups and green fields; and with a charming gesture Mr. Barrie conducted

them to their Trianon, to play at shepherds in the sunshine. The island of *The Admirable Crichton* became their *Robinson*; and his author was the little Rousseau of a new return to nature.

That is really how one sees Mr. Barrie's triumphant advent to the English stage. At any other time those tender demonstrations that wives are frequently fond of their own husbands, that fathers feel a distinct preference for their sons, might strike one as a trifle obvious. But to the hearing of Edwardian audiences these revelations had a strange ring of novelty: for them the platitude was invested with all the dignity of a paradox. It must have been infinitely refreshing to see wives strike out boldly for themselves and stay at home, instead of obeying convention and trotting demurely off in pursuit of another gentleman. It was, if one had learnt

about women from Mr. Pinero, a new idea; and Mr. Barrie obtained full credit for his discovery.

But that charm was bound to fade. All that remains for a later generation is the quality of Sir James Barrie's imagination. That little twist of fancy may seem a small thing. But it has attained to the dangerous dignity of a national institution. Statues are erected to it in open spaces, and reference to it is frequent in public speeches—even in his own. With rare helpfulness he has explored his own elusive quality and returned from the expedition with the unsatisfying announcement that it was all M'Connachie. He, we are told, "is the one who writes the plays," who "prefers to fly around on one wing," who draws the crowds which erroneously applaud Sir James Barrie. But that does not get one much further. One had

apprehended, even before the Rector's obliging self-analysis at St. Andrews, that he had an imagination and that its workings were (like other people's) distinct from the more commonplace operations of his mind. Most of us could see that there was more fancy in it than in the mere ingenious stagecraft which brought a forest up to a French window in *Dear Brutus*; and it had a shrewder, more ironical judgment than was displayed by its author's normal view of human relations. Much of his work, it seemed, could be explained as clever stagecraft or sweet commonplace. But when these had been subtracted, something seemed to remain. It was something less tangible and infinitely more personal. One's only fear has always been that public applause, which always insists drearily on an exact repetition of successful performances, might stale its quality. If a man

paints a policeman well, London—and Paris and New York, for all that I know—demands stolidly that he shall pass the remainder of his days in painting policemen. The danger of that demand has always confronted Sir James Barrie. He had pleased by being whimsical; and when a crowded house invited him to be whimsical again, one feared that his Puck would become less Puck-like with repetition. There are few things more dreadful than a studied whimsicality; and when Rectors grow confidential about their own elfishness, one begins to be half afraid. Elves will not dance to order; and one can only hope that Sir James Barrie will never overstrain M'Connachie's one wing. He is a master of mild sentiment and of that neat manipulation of stage figures which serves to keep the critics quiet. But tears and technique are the least important things about him. For those

who can no longer laugh at his rather wry fun or weep when he evokes a glutinous might-have-been, there is still something in him which is not

> . . . bred
> in the heart or in the head.

That fancy, which is his own, must not be overworked or imitated, because it is ours also.

MR. BERNARD SHAW

Mr. Shaw, like Tithonus, has discovered the secret of eternal age. He is emphatically the Boy who would, however young he might appear to be, grow up. Other men spend half a lifetime in the laborious acquisition of enough grey hairs to lecture their countrymen. They write; they travel; they govern remote parts of the Empire. They wait until at least half the community believes them to be dead; and then, in measured accents, they begin to be didactic. But this long probation was distasteful to Mr. Shaw. He was confronted at birth by the challenging spectacle of his countrymen spread out in rows before him, waiting to learn. It seemed superfluous to qualify for their attention;

and, instead, he promptly claimed it. At twenty-five he was telling them how to do it with the bland assurance of an Elder Statesman. Before he was thirty, he had instructed them in the arts of music, literature, and the drama; and at thirty-five he was reconstructing their morality upon lines which he attributed, with some temerity, to Ibsen. He dealt in certainties, because he made it a rule to know better than his audience. Yet this impetuous flow of instruction was not due to arrogance. The instructor of the English-speaking race was the humblest of men. He has always talked like an uncle to his countrymen, because he has always been old enough to be their uncle. Perhaps he is a rare, an almost alarming case of accelerated development. One seems to think of him as a sort of inverted Peter Pan.

But his native modesty is uncontaminated

by the stern duty of setting everybody right. One of the most engaging features of his method is an unassuming habit of attaching to his strictly personal opinions the name of some recognized (and, if possible, Continental) authority. He invoked the almost spectral name of Ibsen to sanctify his views about Romance. Secure in the certainty that nobody read Nietzsche, he attributed to that shadowy figure his own curious convictions upon the future of the race. Schopenhauer, Wagner, Tchekov, Mozart, even the persevering M. Brieux, each found himself involved in these embarrassing attentions, as Mr. Shaw demurely deposited his intellectual offspring on their doorsteps with a shy intimation of the paternity of his opinions. His prehensile modesty has wriggled behind half the great names in Europe. It enveloped their startled owners with his own views, as

the serpents once enveloped Laocoon and his sons. There were no limits to his coyness. He even helped his friends to form a Fabian Society, in order that there might be in existence a body to which he could safely attribute his own views on current politics. The attribution was successful beyond the founder's most guileful dreams. Suburban statisticians simper proudly at imputations of wicked heterodoxy; and those dismal zealots stand, in the public mind, for freakish qualities which belong exclusively to Mr. Shaw.

Yet the gifts which he most cherishes are the least significant things about him. He seems sometimes to see himself as a statesman. He has never under-rated his own significance as a thinker. His opinions upon typography, oratorio, and municipal politics extort his unqualified admiration; and he has almost

equalled his own expectations as a clothing-, food-, or even spelling-reformer. But there is one light which he has an odd tendency to hide beneath impenetrable bushels, whilst he uncovers with a sweeping gesture other and far, far briefer candles. He writes plays.

Mr. Shaw as a dramatist enjoys a peculiar advantage over his competitors. They spend laborious lives in a long endeavour to convert the actions and conversations of human beings into an attractive entertainment. Mr. Galsworthy pretends that they are all ill-treated; Sir James Barrie (with him, Mr. A. A. Milne) lends them wings; Mr. John Drinkwater dresses them up in a persevering series of mild historical charades. But sooner or later in the evening, since audiences are human as well as the characters in their plays, come the *longueurs*, the stifled yawns, the

faint regrets that we are not safe at home, which invariably result from several hours passed in the uninterrupted society of our fellow-creatures. The figures in other plays are, as Nietzsche ecstatically observed in another context, "human, all too human." But Mr. Shaw has soared, from the very first, superior to this vulgar limitation. To him occurred the happy notion of relieving the British drama from its intolerable burden of human beings and substituting, as the docile vehicles of his inimitable monologue, a procession of fantastic puppets. Impressed, as so many serious critics have been, with the manifest superiority of Punch and Judy to almost all competing plays, he realized that their inspired author triumphed because he interposed no flicker of reality, no faint, disturbing touch of human character between the mind of his audience and that magnifi-

cently bleak conception of crime and punishment. Mr. Shaw, as one seems to see him, resolved to do likewise, to project the cold light of his magic-lantern on the screen without the baffling intervention of any human figure of any remotest touch of sordid reality.

His audiences breathe an air that is unreal beyond transpontine melodrama and the transformation-scenes of pantomimes. He opens a not particularly magic casement on the foam of perilous seas in lands which, though questionably faery, are indubitably forlorn; and he hears the horns of Elfland blowing unearthly, but distinctly novel, airs. His parables are performed by figures of the wildest romance—an inspired head-waiter, an intelligent General, some homicidal surgeons, a saint or so, and a few historical characters neatly inverted. Their lives, their utterances,

their motives bear no relation to the normal and hardly any to the more exotic standards of those rococo types which specialize in Movements and have made Mr. Shaw the uncomplaining victim of their social ambitions. One passes, with the rise of the curtain, into a grotesque fairyland in which all things are possible. King's Counsel wear false noses; Regius Professors of Greek join the Salvation Army and play the drum; Miss Ellen Terry appears suddenly in Mogador; and lions chase Roman Emperors round and round the stage. But the oddities of motive and opinion are even stranger than the superficial queerness of Mr. Shaw's scene. As he jerks the wires, his little fingers fall into strange exaggerated postures which bear no resemblance to the easy attitudes of human beings. Their tiny mouths fall open; but the voice which reaches the audience has a uniform, a

familiar Irish accent. They expose with admirable lucidity their author's personality; but they do it at the sacrifice of their own. How much of Mr. Shaw one may learn from his "Cæsar," and how little of Cæsar. Even his comic dustman, one feels, would be more at home on a Fabian platform than in the humbler exercise of his calling. Perhaps the dramatist's main concern with his characters should be to present a little set of lightning biographies: Mr. Shaw seems to have chosen to compose instead his own intellectual autobiography, and to offer it in a series of mildly dramatic instalments.

Yet there is something else with which playwrights are concerned. Their business, as solemn gentlemen remind them in print on the morning after the first performance, is to write plays, to construct an entertainment round some dramatic pivot. Even the Greeks

achieved it; although they had not, for the most part, the advantage of reading Aristotle. Modern writers, with the voluble assistance of modern critics, have persevered in the attempt to be dramatic. But Mr. Shaw has intermittently scandalized the experts by a bland refusal to play the game according to the rules and a complete omission of all dramatic point. It is a healthy insurrection; since justice requires that if Wagner is permitted to write a drama that is all music, Mr. Shaw should not be excommunicated for writing a drama that is all words. The words, in his case, are excellent words, since he is primarily a good talker who manages to put his talk on paper. But one winces a little at the thought of possible "Discussions" composed by the more earnest of his younger imitators. Mr. Shaw has a wide influence on the young *intelligentzia*. But one hopes that in this

instance his departure from tradition will be a purely personal insurrection and not a standard of revolt.

His influence is strong in those daring circles which strive to keep abreast of the best thought of King Edward's reign. He shares the politics of the Labour Party—those queer pietists who direct the onward march of Progress with eyes turned back to the vague, Victorian figure of Karl Marx. In moral matters he has always marched breast-forward to be advanced, emulating a little the progressive lady in one of Mr. Wells' novels, whose "place was in the van. She did not mind very much where the van was going so long as she was in it." In the result, perhaps, he pays the penalty of his persevering modernity; since persons, whose main determination is to be in advance of the fashion, are apt eventually to be overtaken by it and left behind. His

Ibsen and his Nietzsche bear date, as the dressmakers say. Even his Tchekov begins to look a trifle dowdy. Mr. Chesterton once wrote that "going to 'The Philanderers' is like going among periwigs and rapiers and hearing that the young men are now all for Racine." But even Mr. Chesterton's comment has been overtaken by the fashion, since the young men are once more all for Racine; and as the wheel swings slowly round again, there is still hope for Mr. Shaw.

MR. H. G. WELLS

A WITTY lady, whose novels must be almost as much pleasure to write as they are to read, has discriminated wisely between the things that are and are not News. "Crime is News; divorce is News; girl mothers are News; fabric gloves and dolls' eyes are, for some unaccountable reason, News; centenaries of famous men are, for some still stranger reason, News; strangest of all, women are inherently and with no activities on their part, News, in a way that men are not. . . . If you do wrong you are News, and if you have a bad accident you are News; but, if you mysteriously disappear you are doubly and trebly News. To be News once in one's life—that is some-

thing for a man. Though sometimes it comes too late to be enjoyed."

High up in that enviable category, to a degree which surpasses the public interest in such literary trifles as a posthumous fragment of Jane Austen or a belated reappearance of Mr. Thomas Hardy or even the secret marriage of a lady novelist who seemed to have been reading one of her own stories, Mr. H. G. Wells is, beyond any other member of his calling, News. His activities have attracted that mysterious measure of public attention which is necessary in order to take a writer out of those inglorious little paragraphs, in which alarmingly well-informed gentlemen prattle artlessly about Forthcoming Books and the startling holiday adventure of a well-known circulating-library favourite, who upon one occasion. . . . Popular interest has landed Mr. Wells in the rougher waters beyond the

breakwater, where the news items of the real world jostle one another for our attention, because he is no longer Literary Gossip ; he is News.

It is, perhaps, his ardent, his obstinate connection with the real world which gives him his distinctive position. But at the same time it has gone a long way to deprive him, in the appreciation of fastidious persons, of that rank in the hierarchy of English prose to which he has better claims than almost any of his contemporaries. They might have pardoned him, one feels, the inelegance of being widely read ; even Mr. Conrad's *chic* has survived his popularity. But Mr. Wells has committed a graver indiscretion than success. He has written steadily for more than a quarter of a century, and during the whole of that time he has invariably written *about* something : it was a tragic lapse.

He and his characters have maintained an almost truculent connection with reality that is profoundly distasteful to the delicate palates of our connoisseurs. One may be sure (to name only three popular effigies) that if M. Swann had interested himself actively in child-welfare, if Captain Marlow had played a prominent part in agitating for an amendment of the Merchant Shipping Act, if old Mr. Verver had taken an intelligent interest in the amelioration of labour conditions in America, the reputations of M. Proust, Mr. Joseph Conrad, and Mr. Henry James would have suffered a grave deterioration. That is why Mr. Wells is often out of favour with the *Illuminati*.

Yet it is rarely safe to assume that because an artist is interested in Subject, he is necessarily ignorant of Method. A slender talent may be capable only of one or the other, but a

master is equal to both ; and if you subtract from Mr. Wells the whole of his vivid interest and his fun and his practical significance, you will find that there remains enough bare technical accomplishment to furnish two or three ordinary reputations. He wrote short stories with enormous skill in the days when the magazines were a crowded competition between Mr. Kipling, Mr. Barrie, Mr. Stevenson, Mr. Henry James, Mr. George Gissing, Mr. Joseph Conrad, Mr. George Moore, and all the names of the Nineties. He has contributed, perhaps more than any other writer, to the widening, the enlivening, the greater elasticity of the English novel, which has left it as an almost perfect vehicle for anything that a writer has to say. And through it all he has handled the awkward, the incomparable instrument of English prose with that rare skill which simple readers take

for spontaneity. It has conveyed the sharp thrusts of his wit and the broad, slow smile of his and Mr. Polly's and Uncle Ponderevo's humour. It has described life and death and love and violence with a singular vividness. And more often than one is apt to remember it has painted beauty, sometimes with the bright touch of Mr. Lewisham's "Scandalous Ramble," and sometimes with the slow magic of that enchanted garden behind *The Door in the Wall*, or the exquisite brushwork which made a green hedge in a fairy-tale about a Comet. "It was a very glorious hedge, so that it held my eyes. It flowed along and interlaced like splendid music. It was rich with lupins, honeysuckle, campions, and ragged robin; bedstraw, hops and wild clematis twined and hung among its branches, and all along its ditch border the starry stitchwort lifted its childish faces and chorused in

lines and masses. Never had I seen such a symphony of note-like flowers and tendrils and leaves. And suddenly, in its depths, I heard a chirrup and the whir of startled wings." There is much more in that than the mere skill of a clever writer of scientific romances, or the alertness of a sharp observer.

But after all the thing said, whatever critics may pretend, is infinitely more important than the manner of saying it ; and with Mr. Wells one has always the agreeable certainty that his interest is far more in his subject-matter than in the literary process. Indeed, there are moments when he seems to be so eager to deliver his message as to stray rather outside the frame of the picture in which he is conveying it. But his message (if one may employ a term with offensively evangelical connotations), the thing that he is

attempting to say, is always the most important matter about Mr. Wells and his work. There are other writers, pure stylists and mere literary performers, of whom one may say (with Mr. Albert Chevalier) that it ain't exactly what they say, but the funny way they say it. With Mr. Wells, however, it is quite the reverse. Posterity will read him (and it *will* read him) for the sake of the things that he says, for the vivid image that he conveys of mind, manners, morals, politics, and all the rest of it in late-Victorian, Edwardian, neo-Georgian England.

In one popular estimate, that has survived obstinately from a distant past in which his imagination was entirely engaged by the progress of mechanical invention and the march of the Fabian Society towards its strictly hygienic Utopia, he is still widely

regarded as a specialist in the Future. Reporters interview him gravely upon the prospects of the race; and he is expected to greet each step in human development with a triumphant ejaculation of "I told you so." Yet he would probably prefer to be thought of as the most judicious exponent of the Past, as the first historian to find something more in history than the record of a single nation, or even of the human race.

But the whole of his work leaves one, somehow, with a different impression. One has a conviction that his supreme achievement is his steady and vivid reproduction of the Present, of the passing moment and the contemporary mental atmosphere in which at any given time he is writing. He has painted the intellectual portrait of every epoch of his career; of the precise material ambitions of

1898, which saw a new heaven and a new earth in the horseless carriage and the flying machine; of the vague social aspirations of young Edwardians, to whom the Fabian Society was a revelation and the General Election of 1906 a breaking of chains; of the uneasy, ill-directed longings for a better organized world which preceded the war; and of the vast, dismal realization of the work to be done which followed the peace. His work is a long gallery of 'period' pictures; of Mr. Hoopdriver bicycling through the Home Counties a year or so before the Diamond Jubilee; of Kipps and Mr. Lewisham in the happy British world which President Kruger and General Botha had not yet robbed of its Imperial illusions; of Remington regenerating the subjects of King Edward VII with the Endowment of Motherhood; of Mr. Britling thinking the confused

welter of English thoughts in war-time; and of Joan and Peter facing the chilly, post-war future with the bleak common-sense with which the war replaced the sentiment of the Victorians and the easy idealism of the Edwardians.

Mr. Wells (one can see it so clearly, as one looks back up the long perspective of his work) has always reflected with astonishing accuracy the mood and outlook of his time. Yet his thought never lacks the sweep and vigour of a startlingly original mind. His mental habit, as is not unusual, has been admirably described of someone else. *Ceux qui vous connaissent intimement assurent qu'il y a en vous du rêveur. Ils ne se trompent pas. Seulement vous rêvez très vite. . . . La facilité avec laquelle vous pensez est prodigieuse. Vous comprenez tout à la fois. Votre conversation, rapide et brillante comme*

la lumière, m'éblouit toujours. Pourtant elle est toujours raisonnable. Eblouir avec la raison, cela n'a été donné qu'à vous. Quel écrivain vous feriez, si vous aviez moins d'idées. . . .

But his speculations invariably start on their bold career into the Future from a thorough understanding of the Present. His real merit as a prophet is not so much his evocation of the world in 1960 as an incomparably clear vision of the world in 1923. One hesitates, in a time when it is sufficient to dress carelessly and write incoherently to be called a genius, to put a name to his gift. But that clear vision, which enables Mr. Wells to depict men and women and wars and cities and bishops and Chinamen and shop assistants, to see the drive of a tendency across the plains of America and the little fields of Europe, and the slow drift of mankind down the broad

stream of its history, is his peculiar possession.

One thinks of him as a pair of bright eyes, watching the world alertly and not without malice. . . .

MR. ARNOLD BENNETT

When Edward Henry Machin, at the age of thirty-four, had danced with a Countess at the Town Hall, driven downhill into a canal in a runaway furniture-van, and become the youngest Mayor in England, an indignant Town Councillor enquired with what great cause he was identified. "He's identified," someone replied, "with the great cause of cheering us all up." Those are precisely the credentials which his creator has presented to the solemn guardians of the British Parnassus; and that, if one may attempt diagnosis without impertinence, is exactly what is the matter with Mr. Bennett's literary reputation.

He began to write at an epoch sufficiently distant from our own to be infected with the queer, half-forgotten notion that authors write in order to be read. Mr. Stevenson had been read; Mr. Wilde had been read; even Mr. Pater had been readable. And it was a pardonable error in a young author to imagine that there was a more than accidental connection between the design of the writer and the enjoyment of his reader. The thing might, of course, be carried too far. Mr. Hall Caine was manifestly read too much; and perhaps Miss Marie Corelli wrote with a pen that strayed uncontrolled all over the paper, whilst her eye wandered perpetually out of the window to where her darling public stood waiting in serried ranks. But there was in those days a very definite intention on the part of the writer, even of the most distinguished, to be read by someone.

In these, alas! the bright case is sadly altered. We are slowly learning that the writer exists simply to deliver his own soul, if possible in solitude. The strange, retiring creature mutters his soliloquy to the listening stars, whilst his readers hover uncertainly around, an unwanted audience. The table of modern letters is spread in the sight of no man. Perhaps a few of the author's friends (who write a little themselves) may be asked in. But the public is an uninvited guest, whose feelings are a matter of the profoundest indifference to everyone, except perhaps (if such persons still survive in the rarefied air) to publishers. Even the critics have almost ceased to matter, since nowadays, by a simple but ingenious device, the authors criticize each other. Keats waited for the critics; and as a result the critics waited, in a more sinister sense, for Keats. But if he had lived

to-day he would have been one of them. For criticism has become the side-line of half our authors. The accomplished Mr. X., whose verses we are all waiting for, pronounces the final verdict of British taste upon Mr. Y. as novelist; and when those rhymes appear, Mr. Y. as critic will signify, if he is half the man we take him for, in the usual manner.

On this idyllic scene, where the unread exchange their mutual raptures, Mr. Bennett lingers as a strange survival. This old-world figure writes with an obstinate determination to be read. He seems to believe, in the fearless old fashion, that this is what books are made for. His plays, with a quaint adherence to tradition, are even designed to 'run.' It appears to be the author's queer design to give pleasure to large numbers of persons who pay for tickets

on successive evenings, rather than to qualify the Sabbath gloom of a select company which gets its seats for nothing at one performance on a Sunday night. One expects such conduct from classics. Homer had tried to please his public ; Euripides had even entered for competitions ; Dickens and Balzac were not, one must admit, insensible to ' sales.' But in a contemporary it somehow seemed indelicate. Living writers are expected to cultivate their unpopularity in a literary suburb ; and one can hardly wonder that the young lions of modern letters roared their astonishment, as Mr. Bennett took the centre of the road as a successful author of the old school.

It has been a strange career. He has left far behind him the jewelled revolvers and hissing whispers of the Grand Babylon Hotel. He has passed the innumerable lamp-posts

in Trafalgar Road and the shop-window in St. Luke's Square where Constance and Sophia stared out on life. His admiration of the dark Miss Lessways, which began one evening at the Orgreaves', has dwindled into a respectful feeling for a married woman; and he has launched Mr. Machin on a successful career in the mysterious world of the London theatre, where he has since been followed by many less desirable industrialists from the provinces. Innumerable gas-jets in back-kitchens have squealed and fluttered under his hand; and bath-taps (he has a genius for hygienic gadgets) have confessed to him all their secrets. He has watched Suffragists and football matches and the slow unfolding of unpleasant symptoms; and he has stood by countless death-beds (for Mr. Bennett has something of Mr. Lytton Strachey's peculiar aptitude for last moments).

And at the end of it all he moves with the assured ease of an established writer, who can find a respectful hearing for his lightest reflections on stray operas or the cookery of small French towns.

One feels that he has enjoyed himself enormously, has done it all with tremendous gusto. What fun it must have been to escape from the prim confinement of a solicitor's office in order to write Gargantuan 'shockers' about elephants and automobiles and Mammoth Emporia. How entertaining to kick up sedate professional heels in reviews of unexampled arrogance. And then what an unrivalled lark to give the whole literary show away, to tell *The Truth about an Author*, to deride the "*conte*—exquisitely Gallic as to spirit and form"—and the novel that "was to be entirely unlike all English novels except those of one author . . . to imitate what

I may call the physical characteristics of French novels. There were to be no poetical quotations in my novel, no titles to the chapters; the narrative was to be divided irregularly into sections by Roman numerals only; and it was indispensable that a certain proportion of these sections should begin or end abruptly. . . . O succession of dots, charged with significance vague but tremendous, there were to be hundreds of you in my novel, because you play so important a part in the literature of the country of Victor Hugo and M. Loubet! . . . The sentences were to perform the trick of 'the rise and fall.' The adjectives were to have colour, the words were to have colour, and perhaps it was a *sine qua non* that even the pronouns should be prismatic—I forget." It is precisely that cheerful irreverence about the mysteries of his craft, that obstinate refusal

to prostrate himself before the Ark of the Covenant, which has scandalized the more solemn of Mr. Bennett's critics. It was intolerable that he should titter about inspiration; it was unbearable that he should inform the world that "dramatic composition for the market is child's play compared to the writing of decent average fiction"; and it was almost beyond endurance that such a person should persist in writing extremely good plays and one of the five best novels in the English language. It was as though this frivolous young man from Staffordshire had strayed on to holy ground, and when the grave voice of criticism informed him of the fact from the burning bush, he obstinately declined to remove his shoes.

Criticism has hardly yet forgiven Mr. Trollope the confession that he wrote for three hours every morning, that it was "my

custom to write with my watch before me, and to require from myself 250 words every quarter of an hour. . . . This division of time allowed me to produce over ten pages of an ordinary novel volume a day, and if kept up through ten months, would have given as its results three novels of three volumes each in the year." There is something of that brisk, Victorian efficiency in Mr. Bennett's attitude to literature; and those drooping spirits, which seek in affectations of fastidiousness an excuse for their own debility, will quail before the towering column of his bibliography. But he, one feels, had enjoyed every word of it. He seems to giggle over the jokes in his own plays and to thrill with his own spectacular effects. His short stories have been all too short for him and his long novels not nearly long enough. He has even derived a queer

avuncular pleasure from those improving volumes of good advice with which, alone in English letters since Samuel Smiles, he helps his fellow-countrymen on their way through the world. He enjoys, he must enjoy the exercise of that sharp, superficial observation, which fills page after page of fiction with a vivid counterfeit of physical reality; and he brings out tiny, unknown facts with the mild delight of a collector exhibiting his miniatures. But, most of all, he seems to find his pleasure in being 'in the know,' in nudging his reader with a half-spoken hint that not everybody could have told him *that*. He loves to flit about behind the scenes, to learn how the fine ladies get their finest effects, to see where dapper gentlemen buy those miraculous boots of theirs. He has a wicked knowledge of the dressing-table; millinery is an open book

to him, and over Jermyn Street he has flung his shoe. With that equipment and a lucid cursive hand he has written fine, efficient fiction and has made the English theatre almost endurable.

MR. JOSEPH CONRAD

One would have said at the first blush that a Polish sea-captain was improbable. Maritime traditions are rarely strong in those countries in which it is not possible to take the children to the seaside; although there was once a Servian Navy which ran to a couple of gun-boats on the Danube, and the descendants of William Tell fly the Swiss ensign at the main (or is it the peak?) of a revenue-cutter on Lake Maggiore. But the vivacious countrymen of M. Paderewski belong essentially to *terra firma*; and even if, in rare instances, they take to the water, you would expect to find them in the Illyrian coasting service rather than the more drab surroundings of a British merchantman. So

Mr. Conrad has been unlikely from the beginning of the chapter.

But the oddity of his first career pales into commonplace beside the singular quality of his second. It was strange enough for a young man from Poland to graduate in the Narrow Seas and then to beat up and down the world in British sailing-ships. The Partition of Poland has rarely taken its victims so far afield as Singapore; and Dutch officials in Sourabaya hardly expect their callers to display any degree of familiarity with the Confederation of Radom and the architecture of Cracow. But when that remarkable shipmaster took to writing novels in his cabin, one might reasonably have felt that he was endangering his Board of Trade certificate. The Merchant Shipping Act contained no express prohibition of literary pursuits, although doubtless it has since

been amended in view of Mr. Conrad's grave example. But his proceedings were, to say the least, highly unusual; and when he aggravated the rash experiment by writing with rare distinction in a foreign language, the whole affair began to look positively queer.

It is an odd story, odder by far than any that Mr. Conrad has written; and it would require all the slow march of his gradual narrative method to make it credible. But it is quite true; and as one writes, his strange example may be encouraging Czech cabin-boys and Croatian boatswains to read their Ollendorf and (by a natural sequence) to buy pens, ink, and paper, and become English authors. We can only hope, if Mr. Conrad is a fair sample of the bulk, that they will succeed. There is a sinister rumour that the vested interests of the Authors Society have

petitioned the Board of Trade to schedule the British novel as a key industry for protection under the Safeguarding of Industries Act. But, given the almost total illiteracy of our masters, the intrigue will probably fail. Mr. Conrad, at any rate, is a shining demonstration of the blessings of literary Free Trade.

There is a queer diffidence in his earlier work, which seems to mark the slow steps of a conscious beginner. You will find that in almost every story down to a date well on in his career he has chosen to place the narrative in the mouth of some casual *raconteur*. He seems to avoid coming on the stage himself to say his piece, as the indomitable Captain Marlow waves a slow cigar and does the author's work for him in a long, unfolding story. One would like some Conrad Society to give a public reading of, say, *Lord Jim*,

if only in order to settle the vexed question of how long it really was that Marlow's friends sat round on that verandah whilst he talked the slow tale. But one feels that there is more than that in Mr. Conrad's indirect method. His imitators (and in some of his later work he has almost become one of his own imitators) love to employ it as a piece of subtlety. There is an ingenious fascination about straining a thin trickle of narrative through the minds of two or three intermediate narrators. It is a problem after the heart of Mr. Henry James; and Mr. Conrad seems to find a mild delight in fiddling with the magic-lantern and bewildering his public by interposing fresh characters, like coloured slides, between the simple story and its simpler reader. But it is cynical to conclude that he set simply out to subtilize schoolboy stories of tropical adventure, to

play at pirates with the air of a philosopher, to disguise a hero of Mr. R. M. Ballantyne as a victim of Mr. Henry James. Young men with adolescent tongues in beardless cheeks do things like that in Chelsea. But a Master in the Merchant Service writing in the privacy of his cabin does not play such tricks. One conjectures that Captain Marlow and the whole shadowy host of his successors, who give to Mr. Conrad's work its peculiar indirect flavour, were invented because the author feared to trust his knowledge of a strange language to the adventure of direct description. He knew that he could converse well enough in English; and he cautiously resolved, as one seems to see his design, that his stories should be told in conversation.

That caution may well have been the origin of his method, of the rambling hearsay diction in which we get the shadow-panto-

mime of Lord Jim and Almayer and Mr. de Barral and his inscrutable daughter. But if he was nervous about his literary manner, there was no need for diffidence about the matter. The goods which he brought to market in 1895 were of precisely the right type. One can hardly realize in these days, when a novelist can make a name by depicting a typist in the Underground, the rich, exotic tastes of the later Nineteenth Century. The subjects of Queen Victoria began to thirst, after the first Jubilee, for colour. They turned wearily from the mild, domesticated fiction of the day and craved, with Mr. Browning, for places and times

> When red and blue were indeed red and blue.

Even the Monarchy responded briskly to their demand, and offered them the flags and bright triumphal arches of the second

Jubilee, with lots and lots of coloured gentlemen on horseback. And there was a corresponding dash of the exotic in almost all the literature which they consumed. Those were the days when Mr. Kipling's Indian skies were blue, and he painted towns and uniforms and maps a deep, deep red. Mr. G. W. Steevens described the sunshine at Omdurman; and even Mr. Stevenson was teaching his readers to forget the grey half-tones of Scotland in the bright light of Samoa. So Mr. Conrad was well in the latest vogue when he came upon London with a remarkable prose style and a vivid memory of the Dutch East Indies. Imperialism was slightly affronted by the revelation that the British flag had omitted to wave in a region where the sun so manifestly never set. But the brilliant oddity of the scene, the mild Malays, the bright blue sea, the deep green jungle, and

the sinister Arab traders were a noble compensation; and a generation which was always fascinated by queer names (it fought for months for Buluwayo, and almost went to war for Fashoda) yielded to the exotic attractions of Samarang and Sourabaya and the slow waters of the Pantai.

Yet it was slow to discover Mr. Conrad. He had trailed his puppets up and down the Archipelago, and set them dancing on a narrow, sloping stage in South America, and even brought them home to see the Russian Revolution, before it really found him. His mastery of English was perfect, and his indirect method had ceased to be a precaution of language and become a form of literature, when they all realized on the appearance of *Chance* that he was a man to be read. He had been talked about for years. But respectful allusions in cultivated conver-

sation are a meagre substitute for royalties; and before 1913 Mr. Conrad had enjoyed the limited, if distinguished, appreciation of caviare. Since then he has soared (or sunk) into popularity.

One likes him best when he is least exotic. He seems to have an unfair advantage, to play with the dice loaded in his favour, when he becalms a ship on a windless day in the shallow seas beyond Celebes with a mutter of thunder somewhere below the skyline and a faint line of breakers lying along a low horizon of coast, or when he sets the drums thudding behind a tall stockade as the war-canoes flicker along a dark river between the great trees. You feel that someone else who had been there might give you something (though not quite all) of the same sensation. But when he lays aside the meretricious attractions of strange climates and queer

names, when he is just an ironical observer of his figures at their little antics, he is at his best. The Tropics are well enough ; but there is sunshine, one feels, in Mr. Kipling, and even Mr. Hichens has seen it from the nicest hotels in southern Algeria. Perhaps the best of Mr. Conrad is the observant irony which wrote *The Duel*, and set two little figures jigging in a long, preposterous quarrel against the gaudy, shifting background of the Napoleonic Wars. It should have been illustrated by Caran d'Ache. It might almost have been written by M. Anatole France. And no *amateur* of irony (or First Empire uniforms) could find higher praise.

Mr. Conrad has a queer gift. Like Mr. Belloc, he writes English with the strange perfection of a man to whom the language is not native, with the detachment of a

scholar polishing his Latin prose or his Greek iambics. One feels that he holds each sentence at arm's length before he puts it into place. And its place is always in a long study of fine shades in strange, outlandish places. Mr. Conrad has lived so long in queer company that he can give a touch of oddity to almost any scene. He has made the Upper Congo inexpressibly strange; yet (it is a greater triumph) he makes the Russian Embassy of *The Secret Agent* as queer as the jungle, and his Home Secretary looms like an Island *rajah*. But his gift is something more than queer. It is great; and one is mutely thankful that, out of the four or five languages which that strange sea-captain knew, he selected English for his experiment in literature.

MR. JOHN GALSWORTHY

I

YEARS ago, when England walked by the mild illumination of King Edward's cigar and the streets of his capital were a pleasant welter of horse-drawn vehicles and their new mechanical substitutes, the national intelligence was seriously exercised over the state of the national drama. It has been subject to these gusts of solemnity upon subjects to which solemnity is inappropriate ever since the discovery by those responsible for the conduct of newspapers that ideas form a useful substitute for news in the holiday season. Followed a pleasant trickle of discussion, which interrupted the quiet tedium

of boating accidents and deciduous mountaineers, so seasonable and yet so monotonous in the newspapers of an English August. The mild debate drifted from the giant sea-serpent to the giant gooseberry, and from the giant gooseberry to the Modern Woman, and so, in the first years of the present century, to the New Drama.

They were all writing hard about it in the days of the early motor races, when fainting automobilists drove precariously from Paris to Bordeaux in several days and their despairing competitors plunged impulsively into the cheering multitudes which lined the road to watch the dust go by. The topic has an exquisite, faded air of the Edwardian scene, of the bland Premiership of Mr. Balfour, of the fiery apostolate of Mr. Lloyd George. One catches a faint echo drifting down the wind from quiet days when the cinema was

impressively displayed as a new marvel of science to respectful audiences in music-halls, and the Georgians were still in that horrid nursery of theirs from which they should not yet, should never have been permitted to come downstairs into the drawing-room. And yet it is hardly fair to stare too hard at the faded colours of what once was bright. New College, even the New Theatre, was new once. And so, ever so long ago, was the New Drama.

It was a brave business in those distant days. The dark forces which controlled the British theatre (and its directors have always, if one may believe its more earnest critics, favoured a darkish shade) were to be challenged by the bright young things whose appeal was to the Few. Young Mr. Shaw, younger Mr. Galsworthy, and younger, still younger Mr. Granville Barker shouldered their pens and

marched gravely into battle. The proud banner of the *Intelligentzia* was raised in Sloane Square. If the assault could not be carried into the heart of the West End, their drums should at any rate be heard beating within a reasonably short Underground fare from it; and the Court Theatre became a sanctuary where New Dramatists of competing earnestness but equal novelty carried, as they loved to say, the torch. And by the novel practice of printing their plays they enabled those backward members of the public, who would not run so far, to read.

The whole effort was a gallant endeavour to divert the British drama from its normal channels, to distract the attention of the playgoer from his favourite spectacle of a blonde, dishevelled wife returning at the fall of the curtain to a much-enduring husband after a second Act spent in the more enliven-

ing society of another gentleman. These three figures had become the mathematical basis of British drama. There were other names on the programme, of course; a maid or so laid out an opera-cloak for the erring wife; a few guests stood round uneasily (in dress shirts) whilst she hesitated (in evening dress) on the brink of her error. But there were only three real people in the play that counted; and the sole dramatic unity which England respected was a triunity. Sometimes the actor-manager played Husband; and then his grave features were softly lit up by a red glow from the electric-light bulbs in the fireplace, as he laid aside his book and turned to stroke the blonde leading-lady on her dishevelled head, when she crouched beside his big arm-chair to wait, the two of them together, for the slow coming of old age and the still slower fall of the cur-

tain. Sometimes (when there was to be an act of unusual abnegation, a rare poignancy of renunciation, a slow walk up the stage with dragging footsteps and out into the darkness beyond the bookcase full of dummy books) he played Lover. Or sometimes the three figures gyrated a shade quicker: their rooms contained a delicious multiplicity of doors, and the piece was understood to have been adapted from the French. But there was never a variation in the mathematical formula, in the commuting and permuting Three, until the faint, far trumpets of the New Drama sounded thinly across London from the Court Theatre.

Their quaint notion was to adulterate the limpid flow of British drama by a sudden infiltration of ideas. For the first time in centuries some tea was to be put in the dramatic teapot with the water; and per-

haps there would not be quite so many lumps of sugar in the cup. Ideas were a strange ingredient for an English play, and the intrepid men who were to manipulate them were largely strangers to the English theatre. There was Mr. Shaw, who could state a case; and Mr. Barker, who could write a play; and Mr. Galsworthy, who almost alone among them could do both. He wrote—happily he still writes—an abundance of plays; but from the first he has continued to state the same case. It was in the beginning, and it has remained almost throughout his dramatic career, the case which is known to the Police-Court missionary as the Hard Case.

Mr. Galsworthy as dramatist has dealt almost exclusively in those cruel exceptions whose suffering proves the rule. If he permits justice to intrude on his stage, it is in the form of a miscarriage of justice. If he

tolerates an accident, one may be sure that it is a particularly wanton accident. If there is any luck going, it will be bad luck. His point of view as a dramatist, from the days of *The Silver Box* to the days of *Loyalties*, is an extension, a projection upon the stage of the faintly oppressive humanitarianism which haunts his earlier writings. He seems to pity humanity with the mild monotony of a figure in a *Pietà*. He regards life rather as a retired inspector of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children must regard parents. The sight of a butterfly makes him think of wheels; and he can hardly bear to look at a fly without remembering the cruel, cruel amber.

It is a point of view, like another; and Mr. Galsworthy has embalmed it in an admirable series of plays. Haunted by the cruelty of life, he tends somehow to specialize in the

sort of people to whom life is always cruel, in that concave type which appears to have been designed to meet the impact of disaster, in those shadowy figures who seem to wait, effaced in their little corners, for the inquest and the coroner. The faintly ineffectual charwoman who flits across the tragedy of *The Silver Box*, the helpless little clerk broken in *Justice*, even the gesticulating emptiness of the post-war dare-devil who succumbs to the complex of *Loyalties* are all, one feels, congenial to Mr. Galsworthy's rather nurse-like taste for weakness. He seems to prefer his little men and women to hang about his apronstrings; and it is almost always the Red Cross, scarcely ever the fiery cross, that he raises.

Yet, on the rare occasions when he has tried for larger game, his success has been proportionately large. The world, outside

those humanitarian circles where Conscientious Objectors were more than casualties, is strangely unmoved by the tragedies of weaklings; but the clash and fall of stronger men is the true material of drama. Once at least, in *Strife*, Mr. Galsworthy has achieved the greater performance and set in motion two genuine, developed adult persons down the long road which ended in "a woman dead, and the two best men both broken." That play is a singularly faultless piece of work. One feels too often with Mr. Galsworthy that he is wasting his pity; and one hates to see the milk of human kindness being poured away, as he too often and too lavishly pours it, on the sands. Mr. Galsworthy so frequently weakens a sound play by arguing a weak case. But in *Strife* one is never distracted from the march of the tragedy by a flaw in the argument. One was disin-

clined to be persuaded of the futility of a whole system of law, because the Magistrate in *The Silver Box* omitted to sentence a rich young man for an offence with which he was not charged; or because the sentimental embezzlement of a solicitor's clerk in *Justice* was punished, rather than rewarded, by society. But Mr. Galsworthy's case in *Strife* in unanswerable, and his dramatic handling of it is quite impeccable. Any economic system which maintains in a position of authority employers of labour who resemble Mr. Norman McKinnel as closely as "John Anthony" stands condemned. The author starts with our intellectual sympathies, and we are prepared to let him prove his point in three Acts. Yet he does better. Any Fabian could demonstrate the farce of the existing order in British industry. But it takes a dramatist to make a tragedy of it.

The rare grip of Mr. Galsworthy's plays is only half due to their subjects. They owe the other half to the concentration of his method. You will never find in any one of his pieces that there is a word in the mouth of any character which is not strictly relevant to the tussle round which the play is built. There are no stray snatches of conversation, none of those little irrelevances of which real life is so full; because if you are to state a case in three hours, there is no time for them. His people are exhibited with the one or two salient points of character which are necessary for the play, and one can hardly imagine them in any other situation. One seems to see them always in relief, never in solid, three-dimensional sculpture. The method—one may call it economical or meagre, according to taste—suffices admirably for the drama. But for a novelist (and

Mr. Galsworthy writes novels) it is a frail equipment.

II

There are two stages of a writer's career at which he falls, by common consent, a victim to his critics. At its opening, when he first takes a bright young pen in his hand to confront the universe, the chance recipient of his first book for review is permitted, is positively encouraged, to tell him how it should be done. And towards the close, when he has autographed the last copy of his Authentic Edition (with a photogravure of each of his birthplaces for frontispieces to each of the twenty-six volumes), and his publisher has harvested the last sweepings of his memory in one of those rambling auto-biographies which Mr. Henry James made so fashionable and M. Anatole France so popular,

in that final moment it is open to any occasional contributor to the Press to tell him how he has done it. These occasions are strictly regulated by an odd convention, and any departure from their established order involves a grave breach of literary decorum.

That, perhaps, is why Mr. Galsworthy as novelist presents a case of some difficulty. It is clearly indelicate, at the present stage of his career, to approach him with that profusion of good advice which the critical cornucopia reserves for beginners; and to attempt a final estimate of his work would have all the studied discourtesy of a premature obituary. He may seem to suffer as a novelist from the defects of his qualities as a dramatist, from the simplified characterization which successfully presents figures on the stage by endowing them with a single

characteristic and steadily over-emphasizing it whenever they appear. It may be necessary, if you are to convince the dull-eyed individual in the fifth row of the dress-circle that Sir Berkeley Paradine was a mean man, to present that Baronet, on the three occasions of his becoming visible to the audience, engaged in either counting his money, giving an old friend two shillings for half a crown, or refusing a rise to the under-gardener.

But you will find, if you attempt to transfer Sir Berkeley to a five-volume study of the British governing class, that this treatment of his personality is somehow inadequate. Your readers will not merely complain of your lack of subtlety ; but they will add, with pardonable heat, that your character departs from reality for the plain reason that human beings are made up of more than one

ingredient. One always expects a dramatist to pass off a simple-minded caricature as a substitute for real psychology. But the novelist has got elbow-room in which to develop his analysis; and when he constantly reintroduces Sir Berkeley in the perpetual attitudes of his avarice, one is half tempted to discard all courtesy and firmly to show him the way back to the theatre.

Some twist of that distortion, of that undue concentration of view, may seem to disfigure Mr. Galsworthy's attitude to his people. But it is an idle exercise either to demonstrate or to complain of it. One may assume that, with twelve novels behind him, he has formed his habits for a literary lifetime. He has been given his intellectual latch-key; and it is merely aunt-like to complain of the use which he chooses to make of it. A later

generation may take the charge into consideration when it comes to 'place' him. But his contemporaries, if they are wise, will stifle their good advice. His work is there for them to read, if they want to; and it is none of their business to help him to write it.

But one feels somehow that he exposes a wider target to criticism when he announces himself less as a novelist than as the historian of an age. It had seemed an amiable weakness, as his Man of Property drifted into Chancery and someone put up a board "To Let," that Mr. Galsworthy had chosen to write a series of novels about a single family. If he preferred, as one felt that he did, people with a single characteristic, it was perhaps natural that he should construct a world in which every inhabitant presented that same characteristic without distinction

of age or sex. It was hardly exhilarating; and one has always seemed to understand (better, perhaps, than Mr. Galsworthy) why the one character in the tale who was not a Forsyte withdrew suddenly from the family circle under circumstances bearing a strong resemblance to suicide. But it has always amused novelists to play at Balzac; and no fair-minded reader would deny to his author the manifest gain in illusion which is to be obtained from continuity in nomenclature, from the recurrence of the old names. The suits in Mr. Arnold Bennett's "Five Towns" seem ever so much more real, when one is told that they come, they always come, from Shillitoe's.

But in his Preface (M. Anatole France would call it, with Latin logic, a *postface*) to the collected Forsyte novels the author is inclined to claim that the series has a broader

significance as a document of social history. At that point one ventures, with all diffidence, to demur. It may be, it must be, that so sensitive an observer as Mr. Galsworthy has in his mind a picture of the late Victorian age, of "folk in frock coats and furbelows and a gilt-edged period." But it is not easy to agree that, in this protracted anecdote of a dismal solicitor and his unpleasant relations, he has transferred the period to his page. One sees three excellent examples of his method as a novelist and one exquisite short story. But here is no picture of a period drawn with the strong hand of Balzac or the patient, enquiring eye of Zola. Figures do not become typical by being called so; and characters who have strayed in from a play will hardly live in a novel merely because their creator asks them to. Mr. Galsworthy has written his tales; but they do not recreate

the past. Yet they are none the worse for that. It is the good fortune of good novelists to be read in their lifetime: historians are usually required to die first. Mr. Galsworthy has chosen the pleasanter lot.

MR. COMPTON MACKENZIE

Of course you remember Michael Fane. He was a rather unusual boy, who went to St. Paul's for about three hundred pages. Michael's father was poor dear Saxby. But Michael's mother was not Lady Saxby. He was brought up by a governess, who was a Good Influence and got engaged to a simple soldier with one of those large, hair moustaches. Then (since Michael went to school in the Nineties) there were the bad influences as well. One remembers a wicked Anglo-Catholic and an extremely 'period' gentleman who smoked puce cigarettes. Then our young friend went to Paddington and caught the second volume to Oxford; and the pleasing coincidence, which had led

Mr. Mackenzie to select St. Paul's for his school, sent him to Magdalen for his college, masked under the simple-minded alias of "St. Mary's." This device is no protection for the purposes of a libel action, and can afford satisfaction to no one except Mr. Arnold Bennett, who is the leading exponent of the method: one is really profoundly grateful to Mr. G. R. Sims for not writing about *The Lights of Lonbridge*. The exquisite shadow of Oxford fell across the scene and inspired Mr. Mackenzie to the titular ejaculation, "Dreaming Spires": that, one feels, is the sort of thing that Cambridge men say about St. Pancras Station.

Yet Michael's journey from the cradle to the end of his second volume remains, for many of us, the most abiding relic of Mr. Mackenzie's industry. In his beginnings he walked delicately between a sense of form

and a fastidious vocabulary. Undergraduates read his verses between paper covers, and exquisite young gentlemen caught in *The Passionate Elopement* a flattering echo of their own affectation. The bright beam of his observation shifted a century or so nearer to his own times; and *Carnival* seemed to promise a new school of the Picaresque, in which pretty girls in hansom-cabs trundled across a background of real beauty. But quite suddenly he surprised his contemporaries with the promise (or was it the threat?) of a new *Comédie Humaine*. His imagination was engaged in a vast tangle of fictitious biographies in *Sinister Street* and its immediate neighbourhood. The little ladies of the new Picaresque were induced to enlist in a larger army; and he set out to draw the *état civil* of the West End of London, the older universities,

a few streets in Chelsea, and a country parsonage or so. A wise old gentleman, who had once written for Edward Compton a supremely unsuccessful play called *The American*, was filled with wild alarms by his "waste and irresponsibility—*selection* isn't in him." But in the loose-limbed chronicle he had formed (or escaped from) his method; and he plies it to the general enjoyment on the various islands of his affection. For, like Sir James Barrie, he is an *amateur* of islands. But happily, in the case of Mr. Mackenzie, they are excluded from his work, which clings firmly to the mainland and almost to the metropolis, where there are traffic and the light of street lamps and altars and music-halls.

MR. MAX BEERBOHM

CARICATURE is one of the lost arts. So is the staining of glass. That is why there is so much of both about. Because it is an unfortunate fact that when a nation loses an art, it rarely manages to lose those who practise it. A lost art, to tell the truth, is a little like a lost dog: it strays rather miserably about in a draggled condition until some firm hand masters it, takes charge of it, and restores it to its place again.

That, with the greatest possible respect to contemporary practitioners, is what had happened in a quite distressing degree to the art of caricature in England. Until the purely personal genius of Mr. Beerbohm intervened, the temple of caricature was

quite phenomenally empty, and the fires were almost incredibly extinct. The wind whistled dismally through the vacant place where Gillray had once slashed and hacked at Buonaparte and Signor Pellegrini had displayed to the apprehensive readers of *Vanity Fair* a degree of irreverence towards members of the House of Lords of which only a foreigner was capable. Meanwhile when the caricaturists of Germany and France were duly distorting, inflating, and mutilating their kings, emperors, and statesmen, Sir Francis Carruthers Gould continued to convulse all good Liberals by drawing Mr. Joseph Chamberlain as the Mad Hatter; Sir Frank Lockwood set Benchers tittering with the mild *facetiæ* of his professional pencil; and Mr. Punch's young men biennially depicted Britannia, in full body-armour, enquiring of a watch-

man, " What of the night ? " It was a forlorn, and, for those patriots who looked at the contemporary productions of Paris and Munich, a profoundly humiliating period.

The dawn came in the middle Nineties, when the night seemed at its blackest. Mr. Linley Sambourne was rapidly exchanging caricature for mannerism, and " Spy " was portraying gent.'s trouserings with a steadily increasing perfection, when from the now yellowing pages of *Pick-Me-Up* a Mr. Beerbohm, of Merton, gingerly elevated in an elegant hand the torch of revolution. Mr. Raven Hill turned aside from the depiction of comic Volunteers to write an appreciative preface about him. Mr. John Lane vied with Mr. Leonard Smithers to publish him. And, in fine, he became a classic *fin de siècle*.

" —— and then all the people cheered again, and one man, who was more excited

than the rest, flung his hat high into the air, and shouted (as well as Sylvie could make out): 'Less Bread! More Maxes!'" The picture, allowing for a minor error in the final phrase, which is here corrected by the patient hand of German criticism, was strangely prophetic of contemporary conditions. Only there are not nearly enough Maxes. And perhaps the man, if it is not discourteous to Mr. Bohun Lynch to say so, flung his hat a little too high into the air.

Mr. Beerhohm's career, from its faint, lemon-tinted dawn in the *Yellow Book* to the mellow afternoon in which (it was his finest achievement in sustained irony) he elicited from the *Daily Herald* the scandalized criticism that he was in bad taste, has been devoted to the repression of enthusiasms. Sometimes he has repressed them with a

sweeping pencil and a little water-colour, and sometimes with a meticulous prose style.

Quite, as they say, the little gentleman, Mr. Beerbohm, comes to us in book form. There is a sudden hush in the orchestra. The whirling smoke-clouds of our witches' cauldron part fashionably in the middle. And himself is seen advancing delicately down the centre of the contemporary stage, dressed quietly but, as always, elegantly in a discreet dark-blue binding. The tumult and the shoutings die, but before the Captains and the Kings have time to depart from their stalls to a more congenial atmosphere of syncopated disturbance, Mr. Beerbohm speaks in a level voice and with a very precise articulation.

It is his supreme merit that he is admirably exact, a carver of verbal netsukes. He writes always, if one may state a temperament

in terms of footwear, as though he were wearing patent-leather boots a little tight for him (as such things always are) and holding in his left hand a redundant pair of gloves. It is a perfect attitude, and one may recommend it as a sound corrective for a generation whose typical prophet writes with his head in a bag in order that his disciples may read him with their feet on the fender.

Not so Mr. Beerbohm. Unblinkered (because they ruffle one's hair so), detached (because cliques are so thoroughly suburban), and disillusioned (because illusions are the privilege of the old), he parades his eternal youth, his ineluctable distinction, and that capacity for positively surgical analysis which enabled him to hold gingerly and with the silver tongs of his prose seven men, of whom he was himself the seventh.

It is the peculiar quality of Mr. Beerbohm

that he has left large numbers of people for many years under the fond impression that they, and they only, can savour him. One can only thank him with such courtesy and reserve as he must expect from worshippers at that urbane, that elegant little shrine. *Max vobiscum !*

MR. G. K. CHESTERTON

We live (it is the perpetual complaint of modern men) in a lamentably complex world. When the Crusaders rode slowly down through Europe to the Holy Land, they were thrust upon that long road by a simple desire to fight the Paynim. But when Mr. Chesterton got into the train at Beaconsfield and set his face towards Jerusalem by way of London and Cairo, he was a queer bundle of ideas. Somewhere deep down inside his intellectual clothes one might have found the simple, woad-stained Briton who made pagan gestures at the sun on Salisbury Plain and charged the Roman legionaries behind Boadicea for the crude but sufficient reason that they were foreigners. This engaging person, however, has been overlaid by the

voluminous integuments of Mr. Chesterton's other (and less primitive) personalities. Next to the skin, it would seem, he wears the protective but somewhat bulky metal underclothing of a mediæval gentleman with a taste for physical violence and a preference for his Jews under lock and key. Then supervenes (for he is travelling to visit a British army in the field) the tricolour sash and large, revolutionary sympathies of one of Robespierre's *Représentants en mission.* And finally there is the quieter overcoating of a modern journalistic gentleman, with a good deal of literature on the subject of Marconi shares in one of the pockets. That is the composite Mr. Chesterton with whom we have to deal. One is left with a vague feeling that he travelled to Palestine with Mr. Belloc's luggage.

In that odd way in which it has taken so

many Europeans since Peter the Hermit, he heard the East a-calling. But the delightful surprise that was waiting for him was the discovery, when he got nearer to the call, that its voice was just like that of the West. "As soon as I was walking inside the walls of Jerusalem," he confided to his notebook, "I had an overwhelming impression that I was walking in the town of Rye, where it looks across the great sea-meadows toward Winchelsea." One waits breathlessly for this sentimental traveller to make the further discovery that the utterance of the Prophet Isaiah reminds him irresistibly of that other Rye worthy, Mr. Henry James. But although it never comes, one's confidence in Mr. Chesterton as a guide through the mazes of an Asiatic problem hardly survives this bland assertion that the East *is* the West after all.

When he comes to the Jewish question, our traveller, who has always affected a childish simplicity, remembers only to be childish without being particularly simple. Admitting with a gracious gesture that the Jews (like the Canaanites before them) have some slender historical connection with Palestine, he is magnanimously prepared to allow them to build a religious centre somewhere in Jerusalem. It might even be convenient, he suggests helpfully, to revert to the portable Ark of their migratory period. Round this swinging centre there is to be a scattered, world-wide circle of Jewish colonies; and in all the places where these Jewish colonists sit down by the waters of Europe and America, with their faces turned miserably towards an Arab-Anglican Jerusalem that is strongly reminiscent of Rye, those men without a country are to be branded in every possible

way as foreigners. "Every Jew," Mr. Chesterton writes, with a pleasing touch of his old Napoleonic fancy for outlandish costume, "must be dressed like an Arab. Let him sit on the Woolsack, but let him sit there dressed as an Arab. Let him preach in St. Paul's Cathedral, but let him preach there dressed as an Arab." Resisting for a moment the temptation to ask Mr. Chesterton, usually so sensitive to ethnological distinctions, how he managed to leave Palestine under the happy impression that Arab and Jew are interchangeable terms, one is bound to remind him that if a man is to be treated as a foreigner, it is the foreigner's right to find somewhere in the world a foreign country that he can call his own.

In the distant days when Mr. Zangwill was a symbol of the Jewish national movement, Mr. Beerbohm caricatured him entering the

Promised Land and followed by a complete void. That was a wild vision of Zion and no Jews. Mr. Chesterton's happy anticipation of the future world would appear to be the exact opposite and to consist of a great many, far too many Jews—and no Zion.

MR. GEORGE SAINTSBURY

THERE is an arrogance about these alcoholists. They are perpetually informing a mildly interested world of the devastating nature of their liquid excesses, upon an incorrect assumption that their cubic content is a matter of public importance. In reality one is no more concerned to ascertain anybody's capacity for consuming bumpers, tankards, or flowing bowls (unless he is coming to stay in the house over the week-end) than one is interested in such other personal information about him as the size of his boots or his ability to assimilate large quantities of incongruous and indigestible food. These are all private matters of no conceivable public significance, and it seems unreason-

able that alcohol should be singled out to receive such wide literary publicity. Yet one does not find Mr. Chesterton embarking as a rollicking raconteur of tales of culinary adventure in which the hero eats in rapid succession two lobsters, a great deal of veal, half a pineapple, and something tasty in porkpies. And Mr. Belloc, with whom the bottle has almost become a substitute for religious tests, measures a man's orthodoxy almost entirely by his absorbent qualities, and never transfers his attention to the equally irrelevant consideration of the size of his boots in order to sing :

> So whether the boots be women's or men's,
> From north of the Wash to the Lincoln Fens
> Right good Catholics all wear tens :
> *Domine cives dirigens.*

It is a pity. Because there are moments when writer's thirst becomes as irritating

to the reader of moderate tastes as writer's cramp to the penman. This literary alcoholism takes our men of letters in various fashions. Mr. Chesterton is perpetually slapping the Universe on the back and asking it to have another drink. Mr. Belloc is forever regarding his neighbour with suspicion and wondering darkly whether his continued sobriety is an indication of Jewish blood. But where other men grow quarrelsome or genial in their cups, Professor Saintsbury naturally enough turns omniscient. One would not willingly accuse him of drinking in cap and gown. But he certainly drinks, if one may judge from the range of his literary allusions, in the library. It sets him quoting Dante and Æschylus and Browning and minor pamphleteers of the Seventeenth Century. Sometimes he sets his cap at a rakish angle and digs his reader in the ribs with a knowing

reference to Zola or Sandeau or obscure Victorian comic songs. But always the burden of his song is "Trinc!"

One hardly knows whether to laugh or to cry. It may be entertaining enough for the connoisseur to track down Professor Saintsbury's wine-list through the jungle of his literary allusions. But when he mounts the pulpit with a perfectly solemn face, to beat clouds of dust out of the cushion, and declaim against "the so-called Temperance party" and "magistrates who cackle about the mischiefs of alcohol," one is half inclined to regret that he did not confine his *Notes* to the exposition of one gentleman's alcoholic vicissitudes in the later years of the Nineteenth Century. The analysis of bibulous experience is a topic on which one would listen respectfully to the wine-butler of any West End club; but one would feel

a certain irritation if he extended the scope of his observations to include the more serious political problems of the day.

Professor Saintsbury's own case is a distressing demonstration of the deadly efficacy of environment. After leaving Oxford, of which his chief recollection appears to be "a good brown sherry of Guy and Gammon's," he resided for six years on the island of Guernsey, "where," as he tells in a mood of gentle regret which would melt the intrepid Mr. Johnson himself, "you could get blind drunk for sixpence." Edinburgh is remembered as "the headquarters at one time of claret-drinkers." Holland and the Carthusian Order are identified with the production of Hollands and Chartreuse respectively, and the map of Europe becomes a mere wine-list. The point of view is entertaining, and it is only when Professor

Saintsbury asks to be taken seriously that one is inclined to resent the incurable frivolity of one's elders. One would have been glad to hear a little more of the conversation and a little less of the wine-list; but unhappily the talk is almost inaudible beneath the popping of Professor Saintsbury's corks. Those menus which he lingeringly reprints contain the secret of his fallacy about drink. It is one thing for Professor Saintsbury to sit back and take his port after *Vol au vent à la financière* and *Filets de Pigeons à la Pompadour*. But it would be quite another affair for society if he were drinking bad whisky or arsenical beer in a public-house without any of these pleasing accompaniments. And perhaps it is of that grimmer case that "the so-called Temperance party" is thinking when it incurs Professor Saintsbury's indignation by endeavouring to rob the rich man of his beer.

DEAN INGE

THE economists are perpetually trying to lend interest to a dull subject by giving the most exciting names to the singularly unexciting events which compose the calendar of their history. Thus, when eighty-five stout gentlemen with large cigars lose a great deal of money, which they had not yet made, they call it a Crisis. And when two hundred and sixty-three stockbrokers make an undue noise in a large building in New York, they call it a Panic. And when machinery chased the cottage-worker out of industry and British manufacturers flitted northwards in pursuit of the coal-supply, they call it, most dramatically, the Industrial Revolution.

Now that Revolution, which brought

machinery into production, did something more than change the face of British industry. It transformed the brains of British thought. Our manufactures became machine-made; and that, in a world hungry for production, was a step in advance. But at the same moment our ideas became machine-made as well; and that, in a world starving for lack of intelligent and original thought, was a step backwards. The mechanical printing-machine gave us the mechanical Press. And the mechanical Press gave us the automatic journalist, who is ready with his daily, weekly, or monthly oracle and is as much the servant of the machines as the man who stands by with a piece of greasy cotton-waste.

That is why one feels an extraordinary debt of gratitude to any man of education who is willing to lecture us about public

affairs instead of leaving the business to the harassed men who are chained to their office-telephones and cannot hear what is happening in the world outside for the rolling stamp and thunder of the printing-machines. And perhaps that is why the world of the newspapers has never taken kindly to Dean Inge. Here was a man without a paper to his name (for it can hardly be that St. Paul's Cathedral has a parish magazine), who usurped the authority of the omniscient gentlemen who write the leading articles and undertook to lecture his fellow-countrymen on their affairs. Any journalist could see that the claim was preposterous and had to be denied. The man was demonstrably a black-leg. So they conspired to call him the Gloomy Dean.

It was a silly nickname. But it has stuck. Perhaps this spitefulness was partly due to a genuine uncertainty as to how

Dean Inge really pronounces himself. One is always left wondering whether he rhymes with the first syllable of 'ping-pong' or with the second syllable of 'impinge.' But you cannot dismiss an intelligent and articulate man with a nickname, and the Dean's point of view is often an opinion to be reckoned with.

If he has a fault, it is a weakness which he has learnt from his competitors in publicity, the journalists. He loves to make our flesh creep. He conceals somewhere deep down in that distinguished ecclesiastical composition a taste for scare-headlines. And like all Englishmen when they are about to be most romantic and imaginative, he calls it Facing the Facts.

The fact that he is continually facing is the present state of England. He looks on it from time to time and finds that it is not good.

Starting in the exalted atmosphere of Eugenics, he generally ends up in the crowded morass of present-day politics. In his defence of Eugenics he provides the engaging and unusual spectacle of the Church militant in defence of Science. But it is to be feared that the normal human being will always regard Eugenics as an unwarranted invasion of his right to select his own young lady. The Dean's argument for scientific marriage shews his characteristic courage in defence of lost causes. But in his eagerness to fix the guilt on Democracy he need not have said that " it is only in the lowest strata that the worst specimens, the imbecile for instance, get married " ; because some of us have been to the House of Lords. And the simple truth is that you cannot rob the Plain Man of his Plain Wife.

But from Eugenics and the dismal reflec-

tion that "we are breeding from our worst stocks," he passed on one occasion to taxation. Deans, like the rest of us, pay Income Tax; and Dean Inge is left with the melancholy certainty that "whenever one class imposes taxes and another class pays them, the result is reckless extravagance and foolish waste." But is the extravagance much worse when the poor are taxing the rich than it used to be when the rich were taxing the poor?

We shall soon come, he said, to "the disappearance of the tax-paying class." And that may be true as well. If we do, the English Revolution will have happened without anyone noticing it. Such a consummation would turn our Reds positively green with envy of the wider opportunities enjoyed by their Russian brothers. But it would be quite in the British tradition. When the old France went up in flames in 1793, all

the world waited for an English Revolution to be its counterpart. It never came with fire and sword and guillotines. It merely happened by Act of Parliament in 1832. So it may be that the meek, black-coated tax-collector is the Lenin of the new Revolution, and the Dean had caught him at it.

MR. WILFRID BLUNT

Diarists, in the painful experience of anyone who has tried to keep a journal upon inadequate material, are made and not born. They are most completely the creatures of circumstance, totally dependent for their merit upon the actual interest of their environment. Thus, any student of Swinburne knows that a man may write lyrics of the high seas in Putney ; and a recent observer actually saw William Morris composing epic poems with what the divorce lawyers would call a Hammersmith domicil. But if a man's diary is to be anything beyond an anxiety to his grandchildren, he must live in the world. One has suffered too long under this sort of thing :

"*Sunday.*—Drove this morning to Newington Butts to see the fresh primroses. How wonderful Nature is, to be sure. We dined with William. Walter was there with his young wife, and a Mr. Babbage, of the Poor Law Board; very entertaining. Jane found him extremely genteel, for a public functionary. He says that Palmerston's Government is riding for a fall, and that Lord John is in high hopes. I wonder."

That is perhaps why one winces a little at every new announcement that another diary is to be torn from its legitimate retreat in the mahogany bureau under the bust of Charles James Fox and thrust, mildly protesting, into publicity.

A diary, as such, possesses no more intrinsic interest than an antique. But if either of these objects, in addition to being an original

journal or genuine Chippendale, happens to possess charm or beauty or unpublished points of view, its exhibition is one of the best things that can happen to the discoverer. The diary of Mr. Wilfrid Blunt, reinforced by his later comments and explanations, belongs easily to this fortunate class ; and it deserves a better fate than that evisceration by hasty journalistic persons in search of anecdotes about well-known people which is the normal destiny of reprinted journals. The writer of it moved with an air of graceful and distinguished eccentricity through the semi-political *monde* of the Nineties and escaped, by reason of his social position, those dreary and uninforming dinners with William, Walter and his young wife to which I have alluded. His set was adorned on the political side by the Radical members of Mr. Gladstone's last Government, by young George Wyndham and

young George Curzon, who "was, as usual, the most brilliant; he never flags for an instant either in speech or repartee" (*quantum mutatus ab illo Hectore*), and—one almost gropes for the more impressive interlineated "and" of the theatre programme which introduces the Leading Lady—Miss Margot Tennant. She first appears like a female Paris (and both the arbitrator and the capital city of that name are essentially feminine) awarding the apple between "her political admirers, Haldane and Asquith"; then after her engagement to "a little smooth-shaved middle-aged man, with a beatific smile on his face, as of one to whom Heaven's doors have been opened"; and finally on the wedding day, when "Margot was pale, very pale, but firm and decided, Asquith much smartened up." There are moments when Mr. Blunt's *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de mon temps*

positively rise to the interest of a Society paper, when his old Adam approximates to the young, contemporary *Eve*.

As no well-informed diary *de nos jours* would be complete without a new and thoroughly authentic narrative of the dismal *crime passionnel* of the late Crown Prince Rudolph, Mr. Blunt conscientiously presents posterity with a version of the Meyerling story that is even newer and more authentic than usual. He listened to William Morris shouting down the bargees of the Upper Thames and enjoying that advantage which *bourgeois* poets must always possess in contests of pure imagination, until this country achieves a real equality of educational opportunity. And he is thoroughly in the fashion for depreciating the personal equipment of Meredith, whom he found "a queer, voluble creature, with a play-acting voice, and conversation like one

dictating to a secretary, a constant search for epigrams."

An earlier journal, which Mr. Blunt kept in Paris during the hot weather of 1870, forms a most interesting addition to the book. He watched from the angle of the British Embassy the gradual clouding of the European sky; and he heard the bursting of the Prussian storm with the small-minded enjoyment of an Orleanist, who could not resist his satisfaction at the slow stumbles of Napoleon III, as he went wearily to his fall. So small was his sympathy with the dynasty that he was apparently under the impression that Rouher, the *Vice-Empereur* who had governed France for a decade, was named "Rouère." Mentana, the triumph of the *chassepot*, appears under a singularly trans-atlantic disguise as "Montana"; and Mr. Gladstone's thoroughly effective intervention in favour of Belgian

neutrality is dismissed as "that absurd Belgian treaty." It is a form of absurdity to which British statesmanship has been honourably prone in Belgium.

But the bulk of the volume is filled with the subject of which Mr. Blunt is, from his own angle, an acknowledged master—Egypt. The iniquity of the British occupation, the Machiavellianism of Evelyn Baring, and the astute journalism of Alfred Milner form a background to the whole picture of Mr. Blunt and his contemporaries. The long mutter of his resentment against the slow unfolding of the Imperialist design in Africa is like the drone of the bagpipes under the air which he plays. Wherever he looked in the Nineties he found "the white scramble for Africa" in its undignified and never-receding progress. Egypt, Morocco, Uganda, and Rhodesia each had their turn; and Mr.

Blunt's outspoken advocacy was always equally at the disposal of *fellahin* and Matabele. His narrative of Egyptian events forms a most valuable *apparatus criticus* to Lord Cromer's *Modern Egypt*; and apart from its historical merit, his journal is the fine and enduring presentation of a fearless and honourable career.

M. MARCEL PROUST

THE persistent humility of the English dictates that, at any given moment, there should be at least one book in a foreign language which they *must* have read. It need not be a particularly interesting book. But it should, at all costs, be extremely long. And although it starts in a foreign language, it need not stay there long; because nothing endears a foreign masterpiece to our cosmopolitans like a really good translation. It has been observed that other omissions of reading are comparatively venial in those intellectual suburbs, where families are sharply divided upon the correct spelling of Tchekov, and O. Henry is regarded as a sudden invocation of Mr. Henry James.

But for all candidates with pretensions to real culture, the Continental masterpiece of the year is a compulsory subject.

The steady recurrence of this odd phenomenon is a constant feature of British taste. There is a dreadful dynasty of these bulky despots, which keeps pace with the slow march of Time. Before the war, the throne was occupied by, had even to be slightly enlarged for, that forgotten masterpiece of M. Romain Rolland, in which a young man weltered interminably in his music. Before him, we took our time from Russia; ships, which might have returned from Baltic ports in ballast, were loaded to the water-line with Slav masterpieces; and the expression "from the Russian" developed a mystic power, comparable only to the charm exercised by the equally vague commendation "Wines from the wood." In earlier times

Mr. Matthew Arnold placed on the British market a highly attractive line of the more tedious French prose-writers; and in the very beginnings of modern intellectualism Coleridge had prescribed for his eager countrymen an enlivening course of

sermons
By mystical Germans.

But one is not writing the strange history of the British highbrow. All that is to be noted is this queer succession of foreign pretenders to the British throne.

We are confronted, at the moment, by an almost irresistible claimant to that dignity. The most elegant conspiracies of our literary drawing-rooms centre on that odd King over the water, M. Proust. If the poor gentleman could ever have landed at Moidart, one can almost see Mr. Walkley in his tartan

wading out to receive his royal master, as the boat grounds on the pebbles. And what a rush of Flora Macdonalds, each eager to accumulate those intimate memories of him, by the steady publication of which at regular intervals his friends make such a point of profaning the intimacy. The vogue has risen into a cult; and the cult, embracing the cultured masses, has deepened into a wave; until the whole of our literary taste is threatened by the towering line of this tidal, this positively Marcel, wave. Our tastes, so to say, have been *ondulé*; and one can hardly be modish, unless one consents to the new style. Innumerable Gilbertes and Albertines are being carried to the front; and alternate houses in the more exclusive suburbs are renamed "Balbec" and "Combray." Has not Mr. Walkley announced that "Marcel Proust is one of my prejudices"?

Well, I suppose that he is one of mine too. But perhaps it is not the same sort of prejudice.

Believed at first by large numbers of people to be a misprint for M. Marcel Prévost, he approached the critical consciousness of these islands with certain radical advantages. He had a singularly attractive personal mythology; and for the English, who have always preferred their geniuses dead, it counted for something that he was dying. His works, when they reached England, were almost posthumous; and their reception was pitched in a becoming tone of slightly lugubrious appreciation. The sick-room was felt to be no place for criticism; and M. Proust's earlier readers tip-toed in and out with the proud air of privileged callers. That was, perhaps, permissible. But since his death, whilst the volume of his published work continues to grow at a rate that most of

us find formidable even on a falling exchange, the demeanour of his official admirers begins to do him a singular disservice. Their solemn airs, their hieratic manner, their almost ritual handling of these pleasing works of fiction conspire to render him nearly unreadable. A grave company was recently assembled by an energetic editor, to whom his English readers owe so much. The intention was to lay a wreath of English prose on his grave. But one feels that the gesture was somehow lacking in spontaneity ; and it is almost distressing to observe how many of the more distinguished contributors came to bury Cæsar, not to praise him. The hysterical commendation of the young (and Mr. Walkley is eternally young) is apt to be outweighed by the frank bewilderment of Mr. Saintsbury, the desperate endeavour of Mr. Conrad to say something polite, and the

candid yawns of Mr. Arnold Bennett. On the whole, there is not much to be said in favour of these organized *feux de joie* over literary reputations. But how maliciously M. Proust would have described an evening party of his devotees—unless, indeed, he could not face the lamentable shortage of Duchesses. And so few of them could keep an eye-glass in for half a paragraph.

But how far all these solemn gentlemen are from that charming, interminable inventory of a young man's sensations, which was the work of M. Proust, *essayant de me souvenir, sentant au fond de moi des terres reconquises sur l'oubli qui s'assèchent et se rebâtissent.* That was the Grail of the whole *Recherche du Temps Perdu.* It is idle to object that the quest was not worth making, that the contents of a man's spiritual trouser-pockets are hardly the most appetizing material for the exercise

of art. That, in the dear jargon of the Nineties, is a question for the artist. The reader is at liberty to close the book whenever he wants to. But when he does, he will have a haunting memory of long days in French provincial gardens; of shadowy aunts; of church towers and the finer shades of snobbery; of vulgar little ladies and of Duchesses, how vulgar their proud creator never knew; of sunshine, and sickbeds, and concerts, and days in the country, and all the little pieces which fit together into life. He will remember *Swann*; and in that memory he may forget the heavenly host of his admirers.

SOME LITERARY MEN

THERE is a government in the inner parts of Europe which has omitted to supply the customary statistical and dynastic information to the *Almanach de Gotha* and the *Statesman's Year Book*. It is called the Republic of Letters, and it forms the subject of frequent reference by Cabinet Ministers at public dinners given in honour of destitute literary men. It differs *toto cœlo* from that great Republic of the West, which we learned to know so intimately in the earlier stages of the war from the interception of its parcels post and the providential discovery of a German attaché's correspondence, called by patriots the Scrap of Papen; and it may be distinguished by the possession of three

colonels (Colonel Maude, Colonel Roosevelt, and Colonel Newnham-Davis) from the Swiss Republic, which has, if one remembers the *affaire des colonels*, only two. It is notable to economists for a fiscal policy of more than Mercantilist fatuity, by which its balance of trade consists entirely of exports, and its constitution, which embodies lots of Legislature and no Executive, will bear comparison for pure anarchy with the late Republic of Poland, or with any settlement founded upon the principles of Brotherhood.

This neutral state, as innocent of belligerent intentions as Man before the Fall or Roumania before a decisive action on the Eastern front, was at one time the object of a sinister manœuvre of secret diplomacy: Mr. Shaw tried to bring it into the war. Its exquisite unsuitability for the purpose has been vividly summarized in a couplet of

Mr. Shaw's own "Odalisque's Song" (one of the less familiar lyrics of his early manner):

> The Bosphorus is the boss for all
> In this harem, harem, harem, harem, harem-scarum place.

But having resolved, apparently to be remembered in history as the successful competitor of Dr. von Bethmann-Hollweg and Viscount Grey in the immolation of neutrals, he executed a *démarche* of consummate subtlety. Decorating the unsuspecting neutral state with the flattering name of *Intelligentzia*, which signifies, in the language of one of our late Allies, that arrogant minority which can both read and write, he invited it to assume control of England. A Ministry of All the Talents was to be substituted for a Coalition which it was charitable to suppose had once possessed some but had subsequently buried them; and Mr. Shaw

would be enabled to gratify his long-cherished ambitions with the Lord-Lieutenancy and the resulting control of the Abbey Theatre. The ministerial appointments are at once obvious and attractive. Mr. Arnold Bennett as Chancellor of the Duchy of Staffordshire, Mr. G. K. Chesterton as Toastmaster-General, and Sir Thomas Beecham as Minister of Musicians slip naturally into their places. Mr. Hugh Walpole is a manifest First Commissioner of Wrexe; but more difficulty might be encountered in inducing Mr. Wells to accept the purely legal (and Hegelian) post of Lord Chancellor. And it is delightful to think of the House of Commons sitting for fifty-six hours in the half-darkness and watching the glow of Marlow's cigar, whilst Mr. Conrad answered a supplementary question about the disappearance of a Dutch consul in the Straits of

Malacca; and to figure Mr. Belloc, who would be accommodated as Minister without portfolio because he had lost it somewhere, proceeding rapidly along the line R—R—R towards his room in the War Office is magnificent. But it is not war.

It is an unfortunate fact that the Intellectuals are unfitted for executive posts. Their unsuitability for anything but a commentator's part is apparent from every one of their illuminating utterances. No great man ever knows what a war (or a peace) is about, because any person of intelligence tends inevitably to idealize its causes. He observes, when he is confronted with a war, an enormous and unparalleled dislocation of human existence; and he draws the intelligent conclusion that it is derived from a dispute of commensurate importance. That is precisely where in nine cases out of

ten (and it was the object of our sincerest endeavours to persuade ourselves that our recent case was the tenth) the Intellectual is hopelessly wrong. He is wrong, because he is intelligent. If he were less intelligent, he would move from Golder's Green and be a statesman; and if he were less intelligent still, he would take a house in Kensington and be a Civil Servant. The causes of most wars have been grasped and stated by the officials who conduct them; and the man of light and leading must drop to the level of the leading article before he can understand them.

The attempt was made by several literary men to demonstrate that the last war was a war of ideas; but it was made without conspicuous success. That war, which was, in the words of George III, "bloody and expensive, but just and necessary," was a war of policies; and a policy with an idea in it

is as inconceivable as an embassy with a *doctrinaire* in it. Neither in its origin nor in its conduct was the struggle a war of ideas, unless it may be held to have acquired that character from the establishment of an Admiralty Board of Inventions in a shipping office in Cockspur Street, where some distinguished admiral (with, it is to be hoped, the co-operation of Mr. Heath Robinson) sat waiting, like a sort of inverted Micawber, for something to turn down.

One has a perfect conviction that M. Paderewski never had a notion what Poland was at war for. He left that to an admirably named M. Grabski. It became equally manifest at an early stage that the most brilliant of our propagandists had failed to grasp the elements of England's case in the recent European argument. We were all to be congratulated on the return to con-

troversy of that Gilbert whom (if it is not impertinent to say so) even Mr. Basil Hallam would have hesitated to call the Filbert. But only a hedonist would agree with a statement because he enjoyed it. Mr. Chesterton did not devote very much space to that enemy, in whom we all took such a growing interest since the time that his copper, oil, and rubber increased in spite of the blockade. But having apparently formed what he himself calls the " unfortunate habit of publicly repenting for other people's sins," he filled a considerable space in apologizing for the misdeeds of England. His dramatization of history was founded on the simple and romantic scenario that a buffle-headed England is constantly enticed by a diabolical Prussia into opposition to a milk-white France. The characterization is so plain as to be almost caricature ; and the

drawing is so simple that it is merely *Simplicissimus*. One suspects that his loyalty to his French and Russian Allies was founded on the pleasing institution of the *pogrom* and the public degradation of Captain Dreyfus; and one detects in oneself a constant tendency to enjoy him without stopping to disagree. There is a brilliant parable of the Pan-German horse, which has been reading Houston Chamberlain and discovers in the cat "the characteristic equine quality of caudality, or a tail"; and there is the startling suggestion that Italy declared war on Germany, which would have caused Baron Sonnino to faint in the arms of Signor Salandra.

But Mr. Chesterton will never secure a conviction on *The Crimes of England*. The first charge is that in or about the Seven Years' War the prisoner did unlawfully aid and abet one Frederick Hohenzollern *alias*

the Great to break and enter the Holy Roman Empire and otherwise maltreat the Balance of Power. Mr. Chesterton's reading of British policy is that Chatham took England into the war merely to score off France; and he seems hardly to have noticed that the significance of the whole affair for England was not European at all, but Indian and American. The next count in the indictment is the long war against the Revolution and Empire. Here Mr. Chesterton has a noticeably better case, although he almost spoils it by an observation on the Low Countries, that eternal British *casus belli*:

"It is very arguable that England must, in any case, have fought to keep her influence on the North Sea. It is quite equally arguable that if she had been as heartily on the side of the French Revolution as she was at

last against it, she could have claimed the same concessions from the other side."

One is almost tempted to the angry impertinence that even if the Germans spell Culture with a K, that is no reason why Mr. Chesterton should spell Boche with an *s*.

THE EGOISTS

YEARS ago, when there were horse omnibuses in Oxford Street and editors could still afford a sense of style, someone (there were so many of them in those days) wrote a penetrating little essay about the changes of fashion. Those were the times when they knew all about fashion; Mr. Wilde had a great deal to say on the subject, and one could buy a portrait of Mrs. Langtry at any photographer's. He wrote it for one of those dapper little magazines, all Whistler and margin, which diversified the later years, but not (one fears) the book table of Queen Victoria; and it had all the accomplishment, the rich allusion, the delicate touch which one associates

with a sluggish circulation, a cruel but progressive emaciation of the advertisements, and an early death. Even the names have faded. Perhaps Mr. Le Gallienne wrote something for them; perhaps they had a wicked drawing by Mr. Beerbohm. One remembers only the little essay about fashions. It was so *fin de siècle*, so tremulously daring. The writer played elegantly with the changing shapes of clothes, and then (he must have been to Paris once, and probably on the left, the naughtier bank of the Seine) he hinted that the mutability of fashion extended even to the fashion in virtues. Having launched his wicked paradox, he tilted his hat and, seeing an epigram in the distance, strolled jauntily off up a side-issue, as an essayist should.

But there was something in it. One had felt for a long time that fashions in

good behaviour are subject to change; and so, for the matter of that, are fashions in good writing. Absolute standards of literary propriety may satisfy Quintilian, whose writings possess the peculiar quality of being continually quoted by persons who have never read them. But one hesitates to weigh the moderns in the rigid scales which do well enough to put the ancients in their places. It seems almost brutal to test the little fellows by the chilly canons of literary perfection; and one is bound to admit, unless one is prepared for a more than usually sanguinary Massacre of the Innocents, that there are changes in literary virtue. There is, to adopt a fragment of contemporary jargon, a relativity in these matters. It may be expounded at any moment by Lord Haldane.

What one means is that the critic should

not condemn the literary output of one age, because it is lacking in the literary virtues of another. It is one of the most popular forms of criticism to denounce something for not being something else. Our dramatic critics constantly revile vaudeville because it is not *King Lear*. The method affords opportunities for an impressive demonstration by the critic of his cultured awareness of *King Lear*; and it bravely ignores the falsetto protest of the librettist that had it been his intention to write *King Lear*, it would have said so on the programme. But it is bad criticism: that is why we see so much of it about.

Yet one is sometimes tempted to rebuke our contemporaries by a hoarse, concerted, and vigorous demand that the literature of the Twentieth (or is it the twenty-first?) Century shall display at least one of the

faded virtues of the Eighteenth. Reticence —what a glint of shoe-buckles, what a rustle of brocade there is in the quaint old word— has become one of the lost arts. One has grown to think of it, with ballad writing and the staining of window-glass, as a gracious thing that has faded out of the human repertory. It would be nice to set people asking how they used to do it. We might even have a Pre . . . ite Brotherhood, whose quiet exercises on this muted, old-world instrument would excite that general derision which ensures the support of the young. But it must be the right sort of reticence. One is not claiming to exercise an aunt-like supervision of the subjects appropriate for treatment in literature. That is the function of the police; and one is glad that our newest schools provide them with so much reading which they must find profoundly helpful in

the more dismal parts of their grim calling. The reticence of which we sometimes feel the need is that branch of literary decorum which once dictated to any well-conducted writer of the Eighteenth Century a rigid exclusion from his work of himself, his personal concerns, his own (the word was happily unknown, since there were no interviewers) personality. It might be tolerated in an eccentric like Sterne; Mr. Gibbon could grimace in the privacy of a footnote. But until that dreadful person wrote his *Confessions* (the man was obviously a foreigner), it was an act of literary bad breeding to obtrude oneself upon the reader.

Not so the moderns. Grimacing with the self-consciousness of nasty children, they press round us with an insistent exhibition of their sins, their complexes, their secret

sorrows. One feels, as one looks along a library shelf, as though one had been caught in a crowd of beggars outside a Spanish church. Mr. Compton Mackenzie thrusts his latest autobiography under our noses and asks for a copper ; his younger imitators rattle their tins for alms and show their spiritual scars ; Colonel Repington thumps the pavement with a wooden leg and declaims the story of his life ; eager ladies flap private diaries in our faces ; and the whole crowding orgy of self-revelation cries out for the police to move it on. That is why one turns back, a little faintly, to the Eighteenth Century, when impersonal pens told frozen stories in a manner so detached that the author seemed always to be looking the other way.

It has been a long time coming. When the Victorians were autobiographical, they

were rather knowing about it. A furtive nudge from the novelist's biographer was the strongest intimation that he had permitted a shadow of himself to stray into his own story; one felt that it was an interesting delicacy. But when the dams of reticence were broken (it was before the war), the water came down with a rush. It seems, as one looks back at it, to have begun with *Sinister Street*. Mr. Compton Mackenzie dressed up his early memories with consummate art and a highly remarkable vocabulary; and if the matter had ended there, no harm would have been done. But his brilliant example fired the duller ambitions of every undergraduate in at least two universities, and we were favoured with the memoirs (in thin fictional disguise) of quite a number of profoundly uninteresting young men. They presented

us with a body of novels whose range coincided exactly with the range of the author's experience; if he was twenty-five years old, the reader left him, aged twenty-four years and eleven months, waiting with his first manuscript on the publisher's doorstep. Their memories were lamentably good, and their novels enjoyed that measure of success which is always assured for those whose friends are still young enough to review them. And there, one hoped, the mischief might have stopped. But there was a war.

One prayed for a few weeks that it had stopped the printing-presses. But the armies had not been in position for a month before the ink began to flow. The public appetite for information became insatiable. Men felt, in the war years and in the obscurer scuffles which constitute a peace, that their

destinies were in the hands of a limited number of public characters whose peculiarities promptly became matters of international importance. The market in *personalia* bounded like a rate of exchange when someone has trodden on the tail of a Foreign Minister; and late in the year 1919 we were launched full into the period of revelations. They were not in the least like their Scriptural prototype. There was a marked absence of riders on pale horses; and patriotic opinion in five countries was sharply divided as to where the last great beast was to be located. But one found instead a profusion of disclosures about public figures. Sometimes they did it themselves; sometimes their friends did it for them; and sometimes the disclosure left one doubting whether the friendship would survive the strain. But there was a uniform note of intimacy, of

actuality, of little tales about real people. It seemed as though that dreadful column of the newspapers which obtrudes superfluous information about Lord ——'s taste for Apostle spoons and first editions of *The Vicar of Wakefield* had strayed from journalism into literature and managed somehow to get itself bound up into large volumes. They were extremely expensive; they were received quite respectfully; and we passed at a step into the confessional period of English literature.

It offended against the decencies (if one may refer once more to the convention of the Eighteenth Century) at two points. There was the completest absence of self-effacement on the part of the author, and he uniformly sacrificed his friends to his royalties. One cannot pause to consider the complicated ethics of the diarist; that

is mainly a question for his relations and his club committee. But it is worth noticing that the outbreak, of which Colonel Repington was the most vivacious phenomenon, was not without its serious effects upon the general development of literary good manners. It served to accentuate several of the worst tendencies in contemporary letters, because it proved to demonstration that one could make a highly successful book by writing about oneself with occasional digressions upon other people, provided always that they were real people. As a form of history it was questionable; but as a form of fiction it was frankly offensive. M. Anatole France has observed, in a remark which so many people quote because it may be found quite easily in the preface of a long book of which they rarely trouble to read the remainder, that criticism should record the

adventures of the soul among masterpieces. But one may conjecture that it would surprise that wise old gentleman (who is otherwise not easily shocked) to learn that fiction should record the adventures of the author among his acquaintances. Yet that, or something very like it, would appear to be the principle of construction underlying a large proportion of the fiction which passes under our eyes in its brief journey from the printer to the pulping-plant. The autobiographical novelists took notice of the success of the memoir-writers; and the literary evils, which had been widely prevalent before the war, became frankly epidemic in the grim period of universal contagion which produced the influenza of 1919 and the novels of the Actual School.

We are living, except in those regions of rarefied intellect where they make books

out of an engaging blend of nightmare and aphasia, in a period of weak-kneed realism. Our young friends despise the real master of their craft, whose name was Émile Zola. His work is, for some occult reason, *démodé*; and we have instead an infinite number of rather hesitating attempts to reproduce reality by the simple and tasteless device of inserting intermittent portraits of real people. One is reminded, in reading novels of this type, of the imbecile ingenuity with which a modernist painter occasionally sticks a real bit of feather or an authentic match-box on to his canvas in the desperate hope that this addition may somehow make his whirl of planes and cubes convincing as a Portrait of the Artist's Mother. It is a queer trick. Even Mr. Hugh Walpole, so judicious mostly in the exhibition of his talents, has offended by the gratuitous insertion

of a few literary figures from the circle of his acquaintance. His book gained nothing from the addition, in the sense in which Daudet lit up *Le Nabab* by the brilliant gleam of reflected reality which glances off the iridescent figure of the Duc de Morny. One can hardly complain when a book which sets out to depict a particular world contains portraits of some of its actual denizens. You would not have *Eugène Rougon* meet pure figments of the imagination when he went to stay for a few days at Compiègne at the invitation of Napoleon III and the Empress Eugénie. That, one would explain to the attentive young novelist (and it is the fondest delusion of critics that they are read with attention and by the persons whom they criticize), that is quite a different matter. Mr. Wells may populate the Westminster of *The New Machiavelli* with a few samples

of its actual *fauna*—or *flora*. If you are frankly reconstructing an epoch or depicting a *milieu*, you are entitled to draw (up to a limit fixed by your intellectual banker) upon a credit of reality. But if your professions are merely the general promise of the novelist to tell us a story, there is no reason except your own poverty of imagination or lack of good manners why you should trouble us with portraits of actual people. We can, we frequently do read all about them in the newspapers; and when we wish to purchase a newspaper for the price of a novel, we will say so.

That, one feels, is the kind of protest which might be made with some advantage in the hearing of our young friends with the pens, ink, and paper, who destroy (with the aid of their far, far too tolerant publishers) so large a portion of our leisure.

But it should not be made with half so much vehemence as the other branch of our remonstrance. If it is objectionable to permit real figures to stray, like sheep across a cricket pitch, on to the stage of fiction, it is surely doubly detestable to allow us to see so much of the attitudinizing author himself. It was the pleasing convention of the Eighteenth Century that the writer of the book appeared before the rise of the curtain; he was seen for a moment to strike a graceful attitude in a Dedication. But as one turned the page and passed inside the trim little garden of his work, the memory of his sweeping bow faded and one found only the work itself. In those days writers were impersonal. The main interest of a book was its subject, not its author; and he displayed the fullest, the most tactful appreciation of the situation

by a complete effacement of himself. But Rousseau led in the *poseurs*; and quite soon the trumpets (or was it the voices?) of the Romantics were braying at the gates. There was a sudden vogue for suffering seers, a taste for authors in attitudes, a call for the writer of the piece to show himself before the curtain wrapped in the impressive robe of his calling. Sometimes, in the eagerness of his response, the poor man tripped over it. Lord Byron was seen muttering darkly behind the scenes; Mr. Wordsworth got his mild despairs mixed up with the view of Red Bank; M. Victor Hugo struck terrific attitudes and played all his own characters right off the stage. It was the age of Egos.

Its later manifestations were milder, but no less (to the taste of the Eighteenth Century) inelegant. Mr. Thackeray grimaced

behind his puppets; and quite soon young people took to writing books about themselves without even the faint pretence of any intervening theme. There was a young, unhappy lady named Bashkirtseff, and her *Selbst-porträt* became the model for innumerable Narcissi, each fascinated by a watery reflection of himself. The result, as one sees it at a distance, was the gradual extinction of the old impersonal author and the substitution for him of a grimacing showman,

> Motley on back, and pointing-pole in hand.

It seems a pity. One may be permitted to doubt whether the change (which is a very real one) was a change for the better. It is a modern axiom that self-expression is a substitute for genius. No novelist who is abreast of his age can manage to tell us his story without at the same time

telling us all about himself. But the art of letters seems to derive small improvement from the strong admixture of the confessional which it has received. One can have quite a good painting (Velasquez painted several) without a Portrait of the Artist worked modestly into one corner of it; you will learn all that you need about him from the painting itself. One has never heard that a tale of Flaubert was ill told because it contained no information as to his private manners. Mr. Conrad has managed to paint strange pictures of distant seas without a wealth of inset portraits of Mr. Conrad. So one would ask our little friends, who run about his knees, to mute the unwanted, the insistent personal note. Then perhaps we should begin to feel a little interest in them. We might even read them.

THE CRITICS

One of the most touching things about the United States (and they are rather touching—although, like most people, they would infinitely prefer to appear fierce or impressive or even a trifle forbidding) is their perennial interest in the state of English letters. Over here one is a little inclined to take them for granted, to let those exquisite plants grow unconsciously—with an occasional afternoon for weeding. But that mild, inactive attitude is not nearly enterprising enough for our friends across the sea. They seem to us, as we sit back in a long chair and look at the sky through the leaves, to be perpetually busy about the garden, always trotting up and down the paths with an anxious eye and

a basket full of the dangerous-looking instruments of literary horticulture, stopping every minute to bend over a bed of young novelists or tie up a drooping reputation, prodding the subsoil with an enquiring fork, or taking a selection of promising young plants into their own charming conservatory to tell them (from the lecture platform) just how they are growing.

They are afflicted, in fact, with that nervous inability to enjoy things which Mr. Ford Madox Hueffer defined ever so many years ago as the Critical Attitude. One knows (or, at any rate, one has always preferred to think) that no landscape is ever enjoyed by those gifted persons who know the names of all the plants in it. They are far too busy murmuring *Celosia Jonesii* and *Ampelopsis hirsuta* to notice the faint line of the river through the trees and the slow

drift of the cloud-shadows across the silent hills. One may leave such simple pleasures to the uninstructed observer who can hardly, poor fellow, see the trees for the wood. But while he and his uncultivated friends are gesticulating on the hilltops and generalizing a little wildly about the view, the expert passes proudly by with his trained nose kept well below the ground-level and stops every now and then to examine a moss or prod a saxifrage—

He knows about it all. *He* knows. HE knows.

And that knowledge, so patiently accumulated, is impressively communicated to the world in those little essays in criticism, those short courses in how to do it by which (if only they would read them) those who are rash enough to do it are periodically kept straight by those who are not.

America has not yet, so far as the torpid British perception is aware, reached the second (or graver) stage of the ailment. It is with her at present in the lighter, preliminary form; and there is still some hope that the complaint may pass away altogether and leave her no worse than she was before. One says this because her tendency at present is merely to appreciate and estimate and value and revalue those English writers whose work reaches her: that is an early symptom. But she rarely (perhaps too rarely) tells our young people how to write. That is the final and most exasperating stage of criticism.

The Critical Attitude, which disables a man from enjoying a book in precisely the same way that nervous hyperæsthesia disables him from enjoying his life, passes in the normal case through two phases. In

essence, of course, it is prompted by the barren spirit of enquiry which drives small children to extract all the works of a favourite clockwork bear; and it has been observed that bears (and novelists) who have been subjected to this searching analysis rarely function with the same freedom after the critical process. But one is less concerned with its effects on writers than with its broader and more disastrous influence on readers. The temper of criticism was once defined by the accomplished Mr. Hueffer in the striking exhortation to his countrymen: "Examine into the composition and the past history of your pill before you swallow it." Yet however salutary this injunction may be to those about to consume patent medicines, one somehow doubts its efficacy as a general guide to life. Besides, the normal person is not perpetually employed in taking pills.

The habit of invariably pausing with the morsel half-way to one's mouth, while its composition and antecedents are critically considered, may save a few drug-takers. But it will spoil a good many dinners. Persons afflicted with the Critical Attitude suffer from an almost total inability to enjoy a book as the simple thing that it really is. In the earlier stages of the complaint (and there, unless I am profoundly in error, so many readers are to be found) the patient's mind runs, while he is reading, on Estimates and Appreciations and Tendencies and Literary Values. He is perpetually *placing* writers, like those mental sufferers whose sole occupation is to arrange things in long lines or interminable tabulated schemes. He thinks of poets in *schools* (as though they were porpoises) or of novelists in *groups* (as though they were bulky athletic gentlemen being

photographed after a football-match). And, above all, he never reads a book with the simple object of getting out of it just what the author put into it. But in the second (and fatal) stage the symptoms grow graver. Primary criticism is mainly a failure to enjoy things unless they are arranged in critical categories. In cases of secondary criticism the patient feels an overmastering need to tell those who do things how they should have done them. If he has relatives, they will restrain him; but since critics are recruited almost entirely from the ranks of foundlings, they are totally unrestrained. In this phase the sufferer may be overheard muttering about Technique and Method. He scrawls "Flaubert" on people's doors and runs away. The inability to read becomes complete; but unfortunately it is only in rare cases accompanied by a corresponding ina-

bility to write, and the written by-products of this distressing malady are known as Criticism.

As a continent America has not reached (and one prays to heaven that it may never reach) the second stage of this dreadful progressive ailment. But it would seem that they are tolerably well advanced in the earlier phase. They are always *placing* our established writers. They have a vast appetite for Groups of Younger Men. And the result, if one may offer a word of mild advice, is that this view of English letters is just a shade too inclusive. We have a tolerable poet or so—although they are not at the moment particularly thick on the ground. But in their determination to observe a British School of Poetry they have included in their serious, their kindly appreciation quite a number of industrious persons

whose contribution to our verse exports will never upset the balance of trade. They have got in because American taste was set on having a British School, and one can hardly have a School of two. Errors of that type are apt to occur when people cease to read and begin instead to criticize. And the same taste for criticism misleads them sometimes into solemn appreciation of quite negligible writers. It is such fun, when once one is bitten with the *tic* of criticism, to estimate, to appreciate, to revalue, to wield the solemn critical scales; and if no Shakespeares are about to tip the beam, one pops in Mr. X. Which is all very well as an exercise in criticism and so long as one remembers that he is only Mr. X. But once a writer has been solemnly discussed, one is so apt to think quite solemnly about him. And that is bad for one's

judgment—as well as very bad indeed for Mr. X.

A distaste for criticism is as natural as a distaste for medicine; and in England we have had far too much of both lately. There has been a queer revival of the critical habit, a rise of critics in public estimation which has culminated in the past few years in the erection of a definite critical hierarchy. We are drifting gradually towards that critically perfect state in which it is felt to be more important to know (as Mr. Gosse does) what to say about a book than to write one, far higher in the intellectual scale to adjust the fine balances of criticism than to supply the *corpus vile* which they weigh. It is a strange, almost an alarming development. One had grown accustomed, since the death of Matthew Arnold, to see criticism left exclusively to the *amateur*, to the unbiassed judgment of some

friend of the editor who wanted to get books for nothing. There was something to be said for the method, since it arrived by a rather devious route at a general, popular judgment on the works, and it eluded that professionalism which is the British bugbear. The editor's friend was fairly representative of the great community for which he acted as taster, and his ineptitude was a very fair measure of the ineptitude of the reading public. Somewhere on the heights above him the great critics of the past paraded their lonely figures through the mist; and they, no doubt, in their dogmatism and their spiritual pride were the models of our young friends, the modern critics. They set out with a brave determination to give their public something more than a bare verdict on the work which they criticized. Cheese-tasters and reviewers might confine themselves

to a curt, disgusted "This is bad." But a critic, they felt, was expected to give reasons for his judgment, to lay down laws, to erect standards. So they cultivated an exquisite sensibility and a broad, impressive range of allusion; and at their best they have a stale flavour of Matthew Arnold. But how different the method and the medium in which their instruction is conveyed to the listening spheres. The old lonely critic ingeminating woe on English letters has been replaced by lively, active little groups. The literary streets are crowded with earnest people, all called Diogenes, and each of them looking vainly for one just writer; and the lions are considerably outnumbered by the throng of Daniels come to judgment. The shrill young voices ring out in chorus; and the law, in these delicate critical matters, is laid down for us by a syndicated lawgiver. Worse

still, the multitude of critics has produced schism; and we have a Pope or so at Avignon fulminating critical excommunication against the Pope of Rome. There is an admirable confusion of voices, and counsel is exquisitely darkened.

There are, broadly speaking, in England at the present moment more critics than anything else. They certainly outnumber the readers; and they probably outnumber the writers, too. When a book is rash enough to appear, the writer is summoned before an overcrowded Bench; and the judgments serve to remind one by their abundance that the law is always most fully stated by Courts with not quite enough work to do. But the situation is more serious than that: it has something of the gravity of a crop failure when the mills are kept standing for want of raw material. The critics of England stand

hollow-eyed in their doorways, waiting for work to do. But there has been boll-weevil among the early poets; the novels are all mildewed, and there is even blight among the essayists. In the full horror of the famine the critics have set to work to turn out raw material for their own mills. There was a desperate search among the rubbish-heaps of past literature. Back-numbers were ransacked for unsuspected treasure, and Old Masters were hastily fabricated from the rag and bone shop. It was a simple-minded quest, which deceived no one but the dithyrambic gentlemen who wrote prefaces for the Collected Remains of deceased, almost too deceased authors. But it made quite a vogue for an idiot poet or so; and it gave the critics some work to do, when work was badly needed.

A sounder method, although it involved

some sacrifice of critical dignity, was the confection of masterpieces by the critics themselves. To indulge in mere composition, when one was born to the higher calling of criticism, of appraisement, of knowing how it is done, might seem a grave decline. But the sacrifice was made; the works were written; and the critics, by turning author, got something to write about. Mr. Squire laid aside the sceptre of the *London Mercury*, spent a few mornings with his Muse, and became a poet again. Mr. Middleton Murry tuned his frail instrument to the coarse notes of fiction. Miss Rebecca West hung up the flail and borrowed a pen with results which made one regret that she loses so much time in reading bad novels which she might spend in writing good ones. There was a sudden burst of books by critics, and one half expected Mr. Gosse to write a sonnet. But the crisis

was averted. The critics were given something to criticize, and England resumed her sleep in the shadow of their pulpits. In their truculence and their domination they are at the moment the most conspicuous, if hardly the most hopeful, feature of English letters. There has been nothing quite like it since the critics killed Keats.